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RIVAL SULTANAS



From a print after the picture in the National Portrait Gallery by Mr. Peter Lely.

Nell Gwynn.

*Abdul Sultanah: Nell
Gwyn. Louise de Kéroualle,
and Hortense Mancini ::
By H. Noel Williams :: Author of
"Five Fair Sisters," "A Princess of Lorraine,"
"Unruly Daughters," &c.*

*With 25 Illustrations, including a
Frontispiece in Photogravure.*

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1915



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TO
MY WIFE

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RIVAL SULTANAS

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY LOVES OF CHARLES II

“IT may be said that his inclinations to Love were the effects of health and a good constitution, with as little mixture of the seraphick part as ever man had. And though from that foundation men often raise their passions, I am apt to think that his stayed as much as any man’s ever did in the lower region. This made him like easy mistresses. They were generally resigned to him while he was abroad, with an implied bargain. Heroick, refined lovers place a good deal of their pleasure in difficulty, both for the vanity of conquest, and as a better earnest of their kindness.

“After he was restored, mistresses were recommended to him, which is no small matter in a Court, and not unworthy of the thoughts even of a party. A mistress, either dexterous herself or well instructed by those that are so, may be very useful to her friends, not only in the immediate hours of her ministry, but by her influence and insinuations at all times. It was resolved generally by others whom he should have in his arms, as well as

whom he should have in his Councils. For a man who was capable of choosing, he chose as seldom as any man that ever lived.

“He had more properly, at least in the beginning of his time, a good stomach to his mistresses than any great passion for them. His taking them from others was never learnt in a romance, and indeed fitter for a philosopher than a knight-errant. His patience for their frailties showed him no exact lover. It is a heresy, according to a true lover’s creed, even to forgive an infidelity, or the appearance of it. Love of ease will not do it where the heart is much engaged; but where mere nature is the motive, it is possible for a man to think righter than the common opinion, and to argue that a rival taketh away nothing but the heart, and leaveth all the rest.

“He had wit enough to *suspect* and he had wit enough *not to care*. The ladies got a great deal more than would have been allowed an equal bargain in Chancery for what they did for it; but neither the manner nor the measure of pleasure is to be judged by others.”

Thus wrote that shrewd observer of human character, George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, of Charles II. and his mistresses, and those who have studied the career of the Merry Monarch will not find much with which to disagree.

There was certainly little enough of the romantic lover about Charles II. If he never descended so low as Louis XV. and certain other licentious princes, he was quite incapable of cherishing a genuine passion, such as his famous grandfather, Henri of Navarre, entertained

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for Gabrielle d'Estrées. He did not even demand, like Louis XIV., that his mistresses should at any rate pretend to be in love with him. So long as they were at hand to amuse him in his idle hours, he appears to have cared little what they did at other times. It is doubtful if there is another king in history who would have tolerated the glaring infidelities of Barbara Villiers. Yet they seldom provoked in Charles more than a momentary irritation, and that was caused, not so much by jealousy or disgust as by the doubts which they occasioned whether the children to which the sultana gave birth were his or another's.

Of Charles II. it might be observed, as was said of Philippe d'Orléans, Regent of France, that he had one of those precocious temperaments of which

La valeur n'attend le nombre des années,

since if he did not quite succeed in equalling the achievement of that prince, who was commonly reported to have become a father in his fifteenth year,* he ran it pretty close, and before he left Jersey (June, 1646), when he was barely sixteen, he had already acquired that distinction.

Mr. Osmund Airy, in his monograph on Charles II., gives some interesting details concerning his Majesty's firstborn—a son—whose existence appears entirely to have escaped the notice of most historians :

“The secret was well kept, so well, indeed, that for more than twenty years afterwards, at the time that

* See the author's “Unruly Daughters” (London, Hutchinson; New York, Scribner, 1913).

Charles was desirous of being received into the Catholic Church, he was able to inform the General of the Jesuits that it was known to but two other persons, the Queen of Sweden and Henrietta Maria. Of the mother we know absolutely nothing more than Charles discloses in the same letter. 'The boy was born,' he says, 'of a young lady who was amongst the most distinguished in our Kingdom, more from the frailty of our first youth than from any ill intentions or great depravity.' With her wrecked life, her motherhood which was her shame, she passes like a nameless shadow across the page. Of the child we hear more. In 1665 he was in London, and on September 27 of that year Charles gave a written acknowledgment that James Stuart was his natural son, having lived in France and elsewhere under an assumed name up to that date. Charles further ordered that he should be known as James de la Cloche du Bourg de Jarsey, and prohibited him from disclosing his birth until after his own death, when he might present this declaration to Parliament. The boy then went to Holland to pursue his studies. A year and a half later (February, 1667), Charles sent him another paper—which, like the first, still exists in the archives of the Jesuits—assigning to him, if it pleased his successor and Parliament, £500 a year, so long as he lived in London and remained a member of the English Church. On April 29, 1667, the young man was reconciled to Rome, and this circumstance led to another meeting with his father. . . . In August, 1668—if the documents in the archives of the Jesuits can be regarded as genuine—he had sent to the General of the Order a request that the son of his Jersey boyhood might

be sent to him, in order that he might practise with him in secret the mysteries of the Catholic religion, 'without giving a shade of suspicion that we are Catholic.' But the hope that he might be received into the Catholic Church, while outwardly appearing a Protestant, was destroyed by the uncompromising statement of the Pope in the case of James that even the Head of the Church himself had no power to grant such a dispensation."

Charles II. had undoubtedly an eye for beauty, but otherwise his mistresses did not do much credit to his good taste, and their haughtiness, infidelities, extravagance and jealousy of one another gave him at different times plenty of occupation.

Lucy Walter, the companion of his wanderings and the mother of the ill-fated Duke of Monmouth, publicly disgraced herself and everyone connected with her. The daughter of William Walter, of Roch Castle in Pembrokeshire, a Royalist gentleman whose ancestral home was taken and burnt by the Parliamentary forces in 1644, after holding out bravely for the King, Lucy is said to have been born about 1630. After the destruction of Roch Castle, the members of the Walter family were separated, and at the end of the year 1647, or early in 1648, Lucy, as James II. afterwards put it, "having little means and less grace, came to London to make her fortune." Here she is believed to have resided with her mother's sister, Margaret Prothero, who had married a Dutch merchant of St. Dunstan's in the West, named Gosfright. This aunt would scarcely seem to have kept a very strict watch on her niece, for, soon after the young lady's coming to Town, we find Algernon Sidney,

whose handsome head was to fall on the scaffold after the Rye House Plot, "trafficking" with her for her virtue. But, before this dishonourable arrangement could be concluded, Algernon's regiment received marching orders, and it was his brother, Colonel Robert Sidney, to whose persuasions Lucy eventually yielded.

Him she accompanied to The Hague, where she was seen by Charles II., who straightway fell in love with her and lost no time in getting her away from Robert Sidney, who was, perhaps, not unwilling to part with the lady.

On April 9, 1649, Lucy gave birth to a son (afterwards the Duke of Monmouth), whom Charles acknowledged as his. But the fact that his Majesty did not arrive at The Hague until the middle of September, 1648, occasioned serious doubts as to whether this was the case; and it is certain that, when he grew to manhood, the Duke of Monmouth bore a much stronger resemblance to Robert Sidney than he did to his reputed father.

We need not discuss here the claim put forward by Monmouth and his partisans that a marriage had been celebrated between Charles and Lucy Walter, which gained sufficient credence to make the King, in June, 1678, consider it necessary to publish a declaration, which was entered in the Council-book and registered in Chancery, and stated "that, to avoid any dispute which might happen in time to come concerning the succession of the Crown, he did declare, in the presence of Almighty God, that he never gave, nor made any contract of marriage, nor was married to Mrs. Barber, *alias* Waters, the Duke of Monmouth's mother, nor to

any other woman whatsoever, but to his present wife, Queen Catherine, then living." That the claim was a baseless one is beyond dispute, though it is quite possible, and even probable, that Charles had promised Lucy marriage.

During July and August, 1649, Lucy was with Charles in Paris, and the respectable Evelyn, who travelled with her in Lord Wilmot's coach from Saint-Germain to the capital, describes her as "a brown, beautiful, bold, but insipid creature." Whether she also accompanied her royal lover to Jersey in the following September is not quite clear, but it is very probable that she did.

When, in June, 1650, Charles set out for Scotland, he left his inamorata at The Hague, where her conduct in itself constituted a sufficient refutation of the supposed marriage. For no sooner was the prince safely out of the way, than she began to look about her for consolation and found it in the person of Colonel Henry Bennet (afterwards Earl of Arlington), whom in due course she presented with a daughter.* Not satisfied with the attentions paid by this gentleman, she was also generally believed to have had tender relations with Lord Taafe (afterwards second Earl of Carlingford) and Colonel Thomas Howard, brother of James, Earl of Suffolk.

On his return to the Continent in 1651, Charles wisely terminated his connection with this woman—though he continued to keep her well supplied with money, notwithstanding the empty state of the privy

* This daughter, Mary by name, married William Sarafield, a brother of Patrick, Earl of Lucan, and, after his death in 1675, William Fanshawe, Master of the Requests to Charles.

purse—but he was to have much trouble before he was finally rid of her. Early in 1656 we find Daniel O'Neale, one of the Grooms of the Bedchamber, writing to his royal master from The Hague that he was "much troubled to see the prejudice hir [Lucy Walter] being here does your Majestie, for every idle action of hers brings your Majestie uppon the stage." The particular "idle action" which the writer had in mind was a murderous attack with a bodkin which the fair Lucy had made upon her maid, who had threatened to reveal certain highly compromising facts which had come to her ears, through the indiscretion of a midwife. To save a public scandal, O'Neale was obliged to have recourse to bribery.

After this affair, efforts were made by the King's friends to persuade Lucy to return to England, and this she consented to do, in consideration of an annuity of £400; and was duly shipped off from Flushing, being accompanied by her two children, her maid, her brother, and her admirer Thomas Howard. Previous to her departure, she had an interview with Charles, either at Antwerp or Brussels, where he presented her with a pearl necklace valued at £1,500. In London, she took lodgings over a barber's shop, not far from Somerset House, where she passed as a Dutch widow; but her identity was soon discovered by Cromwell's intelligence department, and towards the end of June, 1656, she and her maid Ann Hill were arrested as spies and clapped into the Tower. Here they were detained until July 16, when they were discharged; and Cromwell issued an order to send away "Charles Stuart's lady of pleasure and the young

heir and set them on shore in Flanders, which is no ordinary courtesie."

August found Lucy and her suite back in Brussels, where fresh scandals followed their arrival, and it was found necessary to place the lady and the future Duke of Monmouth in a sort of captivity in the house of Charles's Ambassador. Finally, the unfortunate King, who had already made several ineffectual attempts to get possession of his son, whom he accused the mother of "making a property of to support herself in those wild and disgraceful courses she hath taken," was at last successful, and placed the boy in the care of Henrietta Maria.

Deprived of the royal favour and separated from her son, to whom, to do her justice, she appears to have been tenderly attached, Lucy was compelled to leave Brussels, where the authorities, indeed, had only tolerated her presence out of consideration for Charles. She made her way to Paris, still beautiful, according to Erskine, and is said to have lived a very depraved life, from the consequences of which, if we are to believe Clarendon, she died in the autumn of 1658.

There are several paintings of Lucy Walter. Among them may be mentioned the painting by Lely at Knebworth House; the demi-nude portrait in the possession of the Marquis of Bute, which was engraved by Van der Berghe for Harding's "Gramont;" and two miniatures at Montagu House. At Ditchley is a portrait of Lucy and the Duke of Monmouth as the Madonna and Child.

Worthless as was Lucy Walter, the mistress whose

reign began immediately on Charles's restoration to the throne, and continued for more than twelve years, was even worse.

Barbara Villiers, afterwards Countess of Castlemaine and Duchess of Cleveland, was the only child of William Villiers, second Viscount Grandison, who fell fighting for the King at the siege of Bristol, and Mary, daughter of the first Viscount Bayning. William Villiers is described by Clarendon as a pattern of virtue, in which respect his daughter unfortunately was very far from taking after him; indeed, if we are to believe the gossip that was in circulation about her in later years, her amorous propensities had been discerned when she was still a little girl. "This afternoon," writes Pepys, "walking with Sir W. Cholmley long in the gallery, he told me, among many other things, how Harry Killigrew* is banished from Court, for saying that my Lady Castlemaine was a little lecherous girl when she was young. . . . That she complained to the King, and he sent to the Duke of York, whose servant he is, to turn him away. The Duke of York has done it, but taken it ill of the Lady. She attended to excuse herself, but ill blood is made."†

After the untimely death of her first husband, Lady Grandison married her kinsman, Charles Villiers, Earl of Anglesey, at whose house in London Barbara was brought up. With her wealth of dark auburn hair, her blue eyes, her perfect features, and her exquisite figure, she was one of the most lovely girls that one could wish

* He was the son of Thomas Killigrew, and at this time Groom of the Bed-chamber to the Duke of York.

† Pepys's Diary, October 21, 1666.

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to see; and, such being the case, it is surprising that her mother and step-father, who must surely have been aware of her inclinations for the opposite sex, should have permitted her the liberty which she seems to have enjoyed. Any way, at the age of seventeen, she had fallen desperately in love with the young Earl of Chesterfield, grandfather of the letter-writer, a handsome young spark, who appears to have been capable of carrying on as many love-affairs at the same time as was the celebrated Maréchal de Richelieu in later years, and was only too ready to respond to her passion. The nature of the relations which existed between them may be inferred from the following letter addressed by Barbara to the earl :

“ It is ever my ill fortune to be disappointed of what I most desire, for this afternoon I did promise myself the satisfaction of your company ; but I feare I am disappointed, which is no small affliction to me ; but I hope the faits may yet be so kind as to let me see you about five o'clock ; if you will be at your private lodgings in Lincoln's Inn Fields, I will endeavour to come.”

In 1659 Barbara became the wife of Roger Palmer, son of Sir James Palmer, a Buckinghamshire gentleman, and heir to a considerable fortune. It was a marriage of convenience on both sides, and was far from putting an end to the Chesterfield affair, for shortly afterwards we find the lady writing to her noble admirer that she was “ ready and willing to go all over the world with him.”

That Barbara entertained a genuine passion for Chesterfield admits of no doubt. “ My dear life,” she writes

to him, when lying ill of small-pox, "I have been this day extremely ill, and the not hearing from you hath made me much worse than otherways I should have been. The doctor doth believe me in a desperate condition, and I must confess that the unwillingness I have to leave you makes me not intertaine the thoughts of death so willingly as otherwise I should: for there is nothing beside yourselfe that could make me desire to live a day, and if I am never so happy as to see you more, yet the last words I will say shall be a praise for your happiness, and so I will live and dey loving you above all other things."

Barbara's illness, which, fortunately for her, left no traces behind, and a duel in which Chesterfield killed his adversary and was obliged in consequence to remain in seclusion for a time, broke off the *liaison*, and later in the year the lady and her husband left England to join the Court of the exiled King in the Netherlands. It must have been now, and not as some writers have supposed after Charles's return to England, that his intimacy with Barbara began, since early in 1660 we find Chesterfield, who was then at Bourbon-les-Bains, informing the latter that he had received "news concerning her ladyship which made him doubt of everything," and entreating her to send him her portrait, "for then he should love something that was like her, and yet unchangeable, and though it would have no great return of kindness, yet he was sure that it would love nobody else better than her very humble servant."

The news to which Chesterfield refers was confirmed soon after Charles's triumphal entry into London, and his Majesty's infatuation was patent to all the

world. On Shrove Monday, February 25, 1660-1, was born Barbara's first child, Anne, afterwards Countess of Sussex, the paternity of whom was claimed by Roger Palmer, but was afterwards acknowledged by the King (by a royal warrant of 1673), though the child was generally assigned to Chesterfield, whom, according to Lord Dartmouth,* she very much resembled both in face and person. Despite this, there seems to be no grounds for suspecting the earl, from whose letters to Barbara it would appear that the lady had for a long time past refused to have anything to do with him, and that even his *billets-doux* remained unanswered.

In the following December, Roger Palmer received the reward of his complaisance by being created Earl of Castlemaine and Baron Limerick in the peerage of Ireland, and Pepys, who saw the patent at the Privy Seal Office, remarks upon the limitation of the honours to the lady's heirs male, "the reason whereof everybody knows."

On March 13, 1662, the new Queen, Catherine of Braganza, arrived from Portugal. In honour of her arrival the principal citizens lighted bonfires before their doors, but there was none before that of Barbara's lodging. However, Charles, presumably to reassure his mistress, spent the evening with her, and, says Pepys, "the King did send for a pair of scales and they did weigh one another;" and it was soon evident that it would require charms infinitely more potent than those which poor Queen Catherine possessed to lure his Majesty from the side of his inamorata.

That lady, on her side, was determined that the

* Burnet, "History of My Own Times."

Queen should not be permitted to remain under any delusion as to where her husband's affections lay, and designed that her approaching confinement should take place at Hampton Court, where the royal couple were spending their honeymoon. It was only with great difficulty that the King succeeded in persuading her to renounce this intention.

Barbara's second child—Charles, afterwards Duke of Southampton—was born early in June, 1662. Castlemaine, who had recently joined the Church of Rome, caused the boy to be baptized by a priest, which furnished his consort with a pretext for leaving him and conveying all her effects and "all the servants except the porter" to her uncle's house at Richmond. Shortly afterwards, the child was baptized again, this time according to the rites of the Church of England, by the rector of St. Mary's, Westminster, the King and Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford, being the two godfathers.

That same day, the Queen, who up to this time had firmly refused to receive her rival, and had erased her name from the list of ladies of her bedchamber which had been submitted to her, was surprised into receiving the countess at Hampton Court. A painful scene followed. "The Queen was no sooner sate in her chair," writes Clarendon, "but her colour changed, and tears gushed out of her eyes and her nose bled and she fainted, so that she was forthwith removed into another room, and all the company retired out of that where she was before." This, so far from causing his Majesty to feel ashamed of himself, merely served to make him the more determined to force his mistress



BARBARA VILLIERS, COUNTESS OF CASTLEMAINE AND DUCHESS
OF CLEVELAND

From a painting by Sir Peter Lely at Hampton Court.

upon his unwilling consort, and Clarendon, to his intense disgust, was commissioned to persuade the Queen to submit to the indignity of receiving the favourite. For some time, however, the Chancellor made but little progress with his ungrateful task, and Charles and Lady Castlemaine became convinced that he was more than half-hearted in the matter. At length, the former, losing all patience, addressed to the Minister a letter couched in terms which plainly showed the irritation which he felt at his want of success. "Lest you may think," he writes, "that, by making a farther stir in the business, you may divert me from my resolution, which all the world shall never do, I wish I may be unhappy in this world and in the world to come, if I fail in the least degree of what I am resolved, which is of making my Lady Castlemaine of my wife's bedchamber, and whoever I find endeavouring to hinder this resolution of mine, except it be only to myself, I will be his enemy to the last moment of my life." Finding that there was no help for it if he wished to maintain his own position, Clarendon succeeded in overcoming the opposition of the Queen; and at the beginning of September the King and Queen and Lady Castlemaine were seen riding together in the same coach, and the pacification of the royal household seemed to be complete.

Lady Castlemaine had not remained long at Richmond, for, learning that her husband had gone to France, she promptly returned to Westminster, with all her goods and chattels. His lordship soon returned too, and on the day of the Queen's arrival at Whitehall from Hampton Court, Pepys saw them both watching

the pageant from the roof of the Banqueting House though not together. "I glugged myself with looking on her," he writes, "but methought it was strange to see her lord and her upon the same place walking up and down without taking notice one of another, only at first entry he put off his hat, and she made him a very civil salute, but afterwards took no notice of one another; but both of them now and then would take their child, which the nurse held in her arms, and dandle it."

The diarist also relates an incident which shows that there must have been good points in the character of the favourite, notwithstanding what certain writers have maintained to the contrary:

"One thing more, there happened a scaffold below to fall, and we feared some hurt, but there was none, but she of all the ladies only run down among the common rabble to see what hurt was done, and did take care of a child that received some little hurt, which methought was so noble. Anon, there came one there booted and spurred that she talked long with, and by and by, she being in her hair, she put on his hat, which was but an ordinary one, to keep the wind off. But methinks it became her mightily, as everything else do."*

As will be gathered from the foregoing, our diarist was at this time, and indeed for long afterwards, a fervent admirer of Lady Castlemaine, or, at any rate, of her charms, and he seems to have admired her as much in lighter costumes as when in "full panoply;" indeed, he assures us that even a glimpse of her laced

* *Pepye's Diary*, August 23, 1662.

smock and linen petticoats, "laced with real lace at the bottom," floating in the breeze one May morning in the Privy Garden "did him good." In the following October, he tells us of a visit which he paid to Sir Peter Lely's studio in the Piazza, Covent Garden, where among other pictures he saw "the so much desired by me picture of my Lady Castlemaine, which is a most blessed picture and that I must have a copy of." And some weeks later he speaks of visiting the engraver Faithorne's and carrying home with him "three of my Lady Castlemaine's heads."

In the late summer of that year, her ladyship had official lodgings assigned her hard by the Cockpit at Whitehall, which soon became a focus of intrigue against Clarendon, in whom the sultana recognized an obstacle which it was necessary to remove at all costs. Before the end of the year she and her allies had succeeded in bringing about the dismissal of the Chancellor's old and tried friend, Sir Edward Nicholas, who was succeeded in his post of Secretary by Sir John Bennet, afterwards Earl of Arlington.

At the beginning of 1663 it was reported that Barbara's influence was declining. The cause of this was the appearance upon the scene of a rival beauty, in the person of Frances Theresa Stuart, commonly known as "La Belle Stuart." The lady in question was the elder daughter of Walter Stuart, third son of the first Lord Blantyre, whose family was related to the Royal House of Stuart. Frances was born about the year 1647, and educated in France, of which country she had assimilated the tastes, particularly in the matter of dress. Pepys tells us that Louis XIV.

“cast his eyes upon her and would fain have had her mother, who is one of the most cunning women in the world, to let her stay in France, as an ornament to his Court.” But Mrs. Stuart was not without her suspicions as to the Most Christian King’s intentions, and preferred to accept for her daughter the post of maid of honour to Catherine of Braganza. And so, in January, 1662, Frances came to England, and Charles II.’s sister, the Duchesse d’Orléans, wrote to the King :

“I would not loose this opportunity of writing to you by Mrs. Stewart, who is taking over her daughter to become one of the Queen, your wife’s, future maids. If this were not the reason of her departure, I should be very unwilling to let her go, for she is the prettiest girl in the world, and one of the best fitted I know to adorn a Court.”

Such appeared to be the general opinion at Whitehall, and the young lady was speedily surrounded by admirers, foremost among whom was the King himself, whose passion soon became the talk of both Court and town. “Meeting Mr. Pierce, walked with him an hour in the Matted Gallery,” writes Pepys at the beginning of February, 1662-3. “Among other things, he tells me that my Lady Castlemaine is not at all set by by the King ; but that he do doat upon Mrs. Stewart* only ; and that to the leaving of all business in the world, and to the open slighting of the Queen ; that he values not who sees him or stands by him while he dallies with her openly, and then privately in her chamber below, where the very sentries observe his going in and out.”

* At this period unmarried ladies were called *Mistress*.

The writer, despite his admiration for Lady Castlemaine, is fain to award the palm to the new beauty and professes no surprise that the royal affections were being diverted in that direction. Speaking of a visit which he paid one July day in 1663 to St. James's Park to see their Majesties pass, he observes: "It was the finest sight to me, considering their great beauties and dress, that ever I did see in my life. But above all, Mrs. Stewart in this dress, with her hat cocked and a red plume, with her sweet eye, little Roman nose, and excellent taille, is now the greatest beauty I ever saw, I think, in my life, and if ever woman can, do exceed my Lady Castlemaine, at least in this dress, nor do I wonder if the King changes, which I verily believe is the reason of his coldness to my Lady Castlemaine."

About this time rumours were current that "La Belle Stuart" had become the mistress of the King. But the young lady, if she were a little frivolous and empty-headed—Anthony Hamilton says that it would have been hardly possible for a woman to have less wit and more beauty, while her favourite amusements appear to have been blindman's buff, hunt the slipper, and card-building—knew how to take care of her own interests, and she had shrewd advisers in her mother and Henrietta Maria. In November, Lord Sandwich told Pepys, that Buckingham, Arlington and one or two other unscrupulous courtiers had formed themselves into "a committee for the getting of Mrs. Stewart for the King, but that she proves a cunning slut, and is advised at Somerset House by the Queen-Mother and her [own] mother, and so all the plot is spoiled and the whole committee broke."

Lady Castlemaine naturally bitterly resented the King's infatuation for her young rival, and sought revenge by encouraging fresh admirers, among whom were Harry Jermyn and Sir Charles Berkeley. The latter was reported to have been seen by Captain Ferrers, an officer of the Guards, in her ladyship's bedchamber at the hour when she retired to rest, though this may have been merely idle gossip. Nevertheless, though his Majesty was so far from neglecting his sultana that he spent on an average four evenings a week at her lodgings, he for a long time refused to acknowledge her second son, Henry Fitzroy, afterwards created Duke of Grafton, who came into the world on September 20, 1663. By way of consolation, however, he handed over to the mother all the Christmas presents which he had received from the peers.

Shortly afterwards, Lady Castlemaine's conversion to the Church of Rome was announced, a step which may have been taken in the hope of pleasing her royal lover, who, as we have seen, was secretly desirous of joining the same communion. "If the Church of Rome," remarked Stillingfleet, "has got no more by her than the Church of England has lost, the matter will not be much."

On September 5, 1664, Lady Castlemaine gave birth to her fourth child, and a month later, to the great indignation of Charles, was publicly rebuked by three masked men, while walking in St. James's Park, accompanied only by a maid and a little page. "They even went so far as to remind her that the mistress of Edward IV. [Jane Shore] died on a dunghill, scorned and abandoned by everybody. You can well imagine

that the time seemed long to her, for the park extends over a larger space than from Reynard's to the Pavilion. As soon as she was in her bedroom, she fainted. The King being informed of this, ran to her, caused all the gates to be shut, and all the people to be found in the park to be arrested. Seven or eight persons who happened thus to be caught were brought in, but could not be identified."*

During the Plague year Lady Castlemaine migrated with the Court to Hampton Court and Oxford, and on December 28 Merton College had the honour of being the birthplace of another son, George Fitzroy, afterwards created Duke of Northumberland.

Soon after the return of their Majesties to Whitehall, the countess received orders to quit the Court, in consequence of a spiteful remark she had made about Charles in the presence of the Queen. But the disgrace was only a momentary one, for, if the affection of the King for her was decreasing, her tyranny held him in subjection; and in the summer of 1667 the easy-going monarch is said to have been obliged to beg her pardon on his knees for his well-founded suspicions in regard to her intimacy with Harry Jermyn. The reconciliation was sealed by the gift of 5,600 ounces of plate from the jewel-house.

Immense sums, it may here be mentioned, were lavished at different times upon the favourite, who was as sordid and rapacious as she was depraved. Three months after the Restoration (August 20, 1660), she was granted, by letters patent, a mortgage upon, or

* Letter of Cominges, French Ambassador in England, to Lionne, October 2, 1664, cited by M. Jusserand, "A French Ambassador at the Court of Charles II."

pension from, the Mint of "twopence per tale out of every pound weight troy of silver money which should henceforth be coined by virtue of any warrant or indenture made or to be made by his Majesty, his heirs, and successors, from the 9th of August, 1660, for 21 years." By letters patent dated January 19, 1664, she was granted £4,700 a year out of the revenue of the Post Office. Besides these, she had several other pensions and was concerned in the promotion of various grants, monopolies and other sources of revenue, and in the sale of public offices and places about the Court. But, great as must have been her income, it was all too small for her expenditure, for she was wildly extravagant and a prodigious gambler, winning or losing as much as £25,000 at cards in a single night; and in the winter of 1666 the King paid £30,000 out of the privy purse to settle her debts.

Meanwhile, Charles continued his pursuit of "La Belle Stuart" with unremitting ardour; but, though that young lady had no objection to receiving the splendid jewels which he showered upon her, he got nothing but kisses in return,* and even an offer to create her a duchess and to "rearrange his seraglio," failed to overcome her resistance.

There can be no doubt that the King's feeling for the beautiful maid of honour approached nearer to what may be called love than any other of his libertine attachments. As early as 1663, when Catherine of Braganza was so ill that Extreme Unction had to be administered,

* But she appears to have been generally credited with giving a good deal more, for in August, 1666, Pepys tells us that he had been informed "how for certain Mrs. Stewart do do everything with the King that a mistress should do."

a rumour was current that, in the event of the Queen's death, Frances Stuart might succeed her. "I despair of her [the Queen's] recovery," wrote the French Ambassador, Cominges, to Louis XIV. . . . "The King seems to be deeply affected. Well! he supped none the less yesterday with Madame de Castlemaine, and had his usual talk with Mlle. Stewart, of whom he is excessively fond. There is already a talk of his marrying again, and everybody gives him a new wife according to his own inclination; and there are some who do not look beyond England to find one for him."

In January, 1667, Miss Stuart's hand was sought by her kinsman Charles Stuart, third Duke of Richmond and sixth Duke of Lennox, who had only buried his second wife two or three weeks before. The King appeared to offer no objection, "pretending to take care of her that he would have good settlements made for her," says Bishop Burnet, adding that "he hoped by that means to have broken the matter decently, for he knew the Duke of Richmond's affairs were in disorder." But in secret, fearful of losing his inamorata, he sent for Archbishop Sheldon and inquired of him whether the Church of England would allow of a divorce, in a case where both parties were consenting and one lay under a natural incapacity for having children. Sheldon asked time for consideration, and, while he was pondering the matter, the Duke of Richmond and Miss Stuart effected a romantic elopement. One dark and stormy night, the maid of honour stole out of her rooms in Whitehall and joined her lover at the Bear Tavern, on the Southwark side of London Bridge, and "they stole away into Kent without the

King's leave."* Charles, when he learned the news, was "furious as a satyr who has missed his clutch at a wood-nymph."† He suspected that Clarendon had got wind of his project of divorce through Sheldon, and had incited the Duke of Richmond to frustrate it by a prompt elopement. Burnet relates how on the night that Frances Stuart fled from Whitehall, the Chancellor's son, Lord Cornbury, who was quite unaware of what had occurred, was going towards her apartments, when he met the King coming out "full of fury, and he, suspecting that Lord Cornbury was in this design, spoke to him as one in a rage that forgot all decency, and for some time would not hear Lord Cornbury speak in his own defence." The bishop adds that Charles's exasperation against Clarendon over this affair was responsible for his decision to deprive him of the Seals. Burnet probably exaggerates, for the Minister's suspected intervention between the King and the object of his passion was not the only cause of his Majesty's desire to get rid of him. But, as Masson points out, "it is certain that some such motives did mingle at last with Charles's other reasons

* Pepys's Diary, April 3, 1667. Elsewhere Pepys tells us that he had it from Evelyn that, after the elopement, Frances Stuart had said to a certain nobleman that "she was come to that pass as to resolve to have married any gentleman of £1,500 a year that would have her in honour: for it was come to that pass that she could not longer continue at Court without prostituting herself to the King, whom she had so long kept off, though he had liberty more than other had, or he ought to have, as to dalliance. She told this lord that she had reflected upon the occasion she had given the world to think her a bad woman, and that she had no way but to marry and leave the Court, rather in this way of discontent than otherwise, that the world might see that she sought not anything but honour."

† Mr. Osmond Airy, "Charles II."

for throwing him overboard, and that Clarendon did not think it beneath him to protest to Charles himself his innocence in the matter of Miss Stewart's marriage."*

As for the new Duchess of Richmond, his Majesty's anger against her was by no means softened by the receipt of a bulky packet which, when opened, was found to contain all the presents of jewellery which he had given her; and in a letter to his well-loved sister and confidante, Henrietta, Duchesse d'Orléans, he thus expresses his wounded feelings:

"You may think me ill-natured, but if you consider how hard a thing 'tis to swallow an injury done by a person I had so much tendernessee for, you will in some degree excuse the resentment I use towards her: you know my good-nature enough to believe that I could not be so severe if I had not great provocation. I assure you her carriage towards me has been as bad as a breach of faith and friendship can make it, therefore I hope you will pardon me if I cannot so soon forgett an injury which went so neere my heart."

Charles, however, was too good-natured a man to harbour resentment for any length of time, besides which the Queen, who greatly preferred "La Belle Stuart" to any other of the royal favourites, seems to have acted as mediator, and in matters which did not run counter to his own inclinations the King was generally ready to oblige his consort. And so, towards the end of the year, overtures were made for the return of the Duchess of Richmond to Court. These at first led to nothing; nevertheless, the spring of 1668 saw the young lady once more upon the scene of her

* "Life of Milton," vol. VI.

former triumphs. In the interval she had had a bad attack of smallpox, which disfigured her seductive face, though not to any great extent, for the King, after his first visit to her, informs his sister Henrietta that "he must confesse that this last affliction made him pardon all that is past and that he cannot hinder himself from wishing her very well." If there were any truth in the reports that were going about, we can well believe that his Majesty's sentiments towards her were of the kindest, for, towards the end of May, Pepys had it on the authority of the omniscient Mr. Pierce that the King was "mighty hot upon the Duchess of Richmond, insomuch that upon Sunday was se'nnight at night, after he had ordered his guards and coach to be ready to take him to the Park, he did on a sudden take a pair of oars or scullers, and all alone, or but one with him, go to Somerset House, and there, the garden door not being open, himself clamber over the walls to make a visit to her."

Whether the wife was more complaisant than the maid had been is a question upon which historians have never been able to agree, but, if she were, it is certain that her husband was no party to her dishonour, since Charles deemed it advisable to send him out of the way, in 1670 to Scotland and in 1671 as Ambassador to Denmark. Here, at the end of the following year, he died, and, as he left no male issue, his titles reverted to Charles II. as his nearest collateral heir, who, as will presently be related, bestowed them upon his natural son by Louise de K roualle.

The widowed duchess, who soon after her return to Court had been appointed lady of the Bedchamber to

the Queen, had several suitors for her hand, but she did not marry again. She died on October 15, 1702, in the Roman Catholic communion, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, in the Duke of Richmond's vault in Henry VII.'s chapel.

Of the numerous portraits of "La Belle Stuart" the best known are Lely's painting at Windsor; another by Lely in the Duke of Richmond's collection, in which she appears as "Pallas," and the painting by Johnson at Kensington Palace. She also sat as model to John Roettiers for the figure of Britannia on our copper coins, and for the Peace of Breda medal (1667), where she is represented seated at the foot of a rock, with the legend, *Favente Deo*. She figured in a similar design on the Naval Victories' medal in 1667, and the same year a special medal was struck in her honour, with Britannia on the reverse.

After the elopement of Frances Stuart with the Duke of Richmond, Lady Castlemaine's supremacy at Court seemed more assured than ever, insomuch that Louis XIV. directed his Ambassador, Colbert de Croissy, to lavish every possible attention on the favourite, in the hope of coaxing State secrets out of her. The Ambassador did not fail to follow these instructions, and paid the countess the most assiduous court; but he very quickly perceived that she was too much dominated by the passion of the moment for any reliance to be placed on her support.

At the end of August came the fall of Clarendon, an event to which the persistent hostility of Lady Castlemaine and her faction had largely contributed. She had

openly expressed her desire to see the Minister's head on a charger, and when she heard that he was returning from his final audience of the King, she rushed out in her smock into her aviary overlooking Whitehall, "anxious to read in the saddened air of her distinguished enemy some presage of his fall," and bandied jests with the courtiers at the great statesman's expense. "The Chancellor's disgrace," says Pepys, "was certainly designed in my Lady Castlemayne's chamber; and that when he went for the King on Monday morning she was in bed, though about twelve o'clock, and ran out in her smock into her aviary looking into Whitehall Garden; and thither her woman brought her her night-gown [dressing-gown], and stood joying herself at the old man's going away; and several of the gallants of Whitehall, of which there were many standing to see the Chancellor's return, did talk to her in her bird-cage, among others Blanford [Louis de Duras, Marquis de Blanquefort], telling her she was the bird of Paradise."

What a picture! A rapacious courtesan gloating over the disgrace of the greatest statesman of his time—the man who had consolidated the Restoration—and that group of rakes and pimps and gamblers fawning upon her!

But though her rival had left the Court for a time and her enemy for ever, Barbara Villiers's own domination was drawing to a close; and the King, weary of her infidelities, her greed, and her ill-humour, was about to inflict upon her the mortification of having an actress as a competitor for his favours, before finding the enchantress who was to lure him completely away.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF NELL GWYN

THE rallying-point of the great Anti-Puritan reaction which followed the Restoration was the theatre. Nor is this surprising when we consider how much the drama had suffered under Puritan rule and how well fitted it was to give expression to all the pleasures of life which the "saints" had striven to trample under foot. Since 1647, indeed, the theatres had been suppressed altogether, the players declared to be rogues, the exercise of their profession forbidden under the severest penalties, and persons found witnessing a stage-play punished by fines. Nevertheless, attempts were made by some of the bolder spirits of the persecuted profession to revive their old trade privately, and in the winter of 1648 a company formed out of the scattered members of several began with extreme caution to give performances at the Cockpit, in Drury Lane. They continued undisturbed for three or four days, when "a party of foot-soldiers beset the house, surprised them about the middle of the play, and carried 'em away in their habits, not admitting them to shift, to Hatton House, then a prison, where

they detained them some time, plundered them of their clothes, and let them loose again." *

When Cromwell became Protector, there was a slight relaxation of the persecution. At Christmas and at Battledore Fair, the players used to bribe the officers who commanded the Guard at Whitehall, and were, in consequence, enabled to act for a few days at the Red Bull,† but were sometimes, notwithstanding, disturbed by soldiers; while private performances were not infrequently given at different noblemen's houses, and in particular at Holland House, at Kensington, "where the nobility and gentry who met (but in no great numbers) used to make a sum for them, each giving a broad piece or the like." ‡

In 1656 the rigours of fanaticism were so far relaxed that Sir William Davenant's play, *The Cruelty of the Spaniards*, was performed at the Cockpit; but this concession was probably due to Cromwell's desire to place that nation before the people in an odious light and increase the popularity of the war with Spain.

As soon as Monk at the head of his army declared for the King, the actors who had survived the hard times emerged from their hiding-places, and were organized into a company by Rhodes, formerly prompter at the Blackfriars Theatre, under whom they performed at the Red Bull. Rhodes afterwards performed at the Cockpit and at Salisbury Court, but before this the best of the players had gone over to Thomas Killigrew.

At the Restoration, the drama, freed from the fetters

* *Historia Histronica* (London, 1699).

† The site of the Red Bull is now covered by Woodbridge Street.

‡ *Historia Histronica* (London, 1699).

which had so closely confined it for over fifteen years, found itself in the enjoyment of a prosperity infinitely greater than it had ever before known, for both Charles II. and his brother were enthusiastic playgoers, and all classes flocked to the theatre with appetites sharpened by their long abstinence. The old theatres were now reopened, and with every advantage which stage properties, new and improved scenery and the costliest dresses could lend to help them forward, and in London great interest was used for the erection of new playhouses. But the King, acting, it is believed, on the advice of Clarendon, who desired to do all in his power to stem the rising flood of gaiety and dissipation, would not allow of more than two—the King's Theatre and the Duke's Theatre (so called in compliment to James, Duke of York). The patent for the first was given to Thomas Killigrew, one of the grooms of the Chambers, and a dramatist himself; the second was placed under the direction of Sir William Davenant, Poet Laureate to Charles II., as he had been to the late King, and a successful writer for the stage, while Ben Jonson and Massinger were still alive. Davenant erected his theatre in Portugal Row, on the south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and his company began acting there in June, 1661.

Killigrew selected the site of a riding-school in Drury Lane, almost exactly on the spot on which the present theatre now stands. The ground-rent of the riding-yard was £50 a year, and the cost of erecting the theatre £1,500. It was a small house, with but few pretensions to architectural beauty, the dimensions of the building being 112 feet from east to west and 59 feet from north

to south. The stage was lighted with wax candles, on brass censers or cressets. The pit lay open to the weather for the sake of light, but was subsequently covered in with a glazed cupola, which, however, only imperfectly protected the audience, so that in stormy weather the house was thrown into disorder, and the people in the pit were fain to rise. The theatre, the chief entrance of which was in Little Russell Street, not as now in Brydges Street, was first opened on April 8, 1663, with a representation of Beaumont and Fletcher's play *The Humourous Lieutenant*.*

The performances at both houses began at three, and the prices were: boxes four shillings, pit two and sixpence, middle gallery eighteen pence, upper gallery one shilling. Ladies in the pit wore vizards or masks, and this custom appears to have continued until the beginning of the reign of George I., when the practice was no longer permitted, the mask being regarded as the mark of a courtesan. The middle gallery, we learn from Pepys, was long the favourite resort of the diarist and his wife. The upper gallery was attended by the poorest and the noisiest, as is the case in modern theatres. Servants in livery were admitted free as soon as the fifth act began.

An innovation of a highly important character distinguished the playhouses of the Restoration from those which had preceded the Great Rebellion. This was the appearance of women upon the stage.†

* The hour when the play began grew later with the dinner-hour. Thus in Shakespeare's time they began at one, while in Congreve's the curtain did not rise until four o'clock.

† Mr. Cecil Chesterton, in his charming monograph on Nell Gwyn, speaks of

From the earliest epoch of the Stage in England until the theatres were silenced at the outbreak of the Civil War, female characters had invariably been played by men. In 1629 a company of French actors, in which women were included, had appeared at the Blackfriars and afterwards at the Red Bull and the Fortune. But very great hostility appears to have been manifested against them, and it was only after the Restoration that the new system became acclimatized here. "Whereas," runs Davenant's patent for the Duke's Theatre, "the women's parts in plays have hitherto been acted by men, at which some have taken offence, we do give leave that for the time to come all women's parts be acted by women." Nevertheless, for several years after this boys and young men continued to share the heroines of tragedy and comedy with the actresses, and appear, in some instances, to have more than held their own with the opposite sex in the estimation of the public. Thus, on January 3, 1667, Pepys notes that he saw Ben Jonson's *Silent Woman* with "Kineston the boy" as Epicoene; and records his impression that, in female attire, he was "the prettiest woman in the whole house, and as a man, likewise did appear the handsomest man in the house."

two important changes; the other being the introduction of scenery. This is a common error. It is true that in the *Historia Histriionica*, published in 1699, it is distinctly stated that scenery was first introduced upon the stage by Davenant at the Duke's Theatre in 1663. But, as Mr. Baker has pointed out in his interesting "History of the London Stage," we know that Ben Jonson and Shirley's masques were illustrated by Inigo Jones in a way that would tax the powers of even a modern artist; while "the Elizabethan drama abounds in stage directions, which, if every kind of scenic effect were unknown, are perfectly meaningless."

At both the King's and the Duke's Theatres there was a perfect galaxy of histrionic talent. At the former house the leading actors were Charles Hart and Michael Mohun, both of whom had fought in the royal cause during the Civil War. Mohun was famous in the rôles of Iago and Cassius; while Hart, who was the grand-nephew of Shakespeare, rose to the very summit of his profession. In the days of Charles I. he had acted women's parts at the Blackfriars Theatre with conspicuous success, and he was now even more successful in the presentation of masculine characters. He was the best Othello that had yet been seen, and so dignified and impressive was his acting in the part of Alexander that one of the courtiers declared that "Hart might teach any king on earth how to comport himself."* Then there was John Lacy, famous as a comedian; William Cartwright, who won great renown as Falstaff, and as one of the two Kings of Brentford in the farce of the *Rehearsal*; Wintershall, celebrated for his Cokes in Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair, and Kynaston, who continued to shine in female parts long after the introduction of women to the stage. Among the actresses of the troupe were Mrs. Corey, the original Widow Blackacre in Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*; Rebecca, or "Beck" Marshall, reported, though incorrectly, to be the daughter of the great Presbyterian divine of that name, who preached the sermon at the funeral of John Pym; Mrs. Weaver, one of the several actresses "spoiled" by Charles II.; Peg Hughes, who soothed the old age of Prince Rupert and had a daughter by him called Ruperta, and Mrs. Uphill, first the mistress

* *Roscius Anglicanus.*

and afterwards the wife of Sir Robert Howard, the poet, and Mrs. Knipp,* so admired of Mr. Samuel Pepys.

Foremost of the actors at the Duke's Theatre stood the celebrated Thomas Betterton, one of the greatest who ever trod the boards of an English theatre. He was soon to overshadow all his colleagues, notwithstanding that the company contained some excellent representatives of both the tragic and the comic art. Among them may be mentioned Joseph Harris, originally a seal-cutter, and famous in the parts of Romeo, Wolsey and Sir Andrew Aguecheek; William Smith, a barrister of Gray's Inn, celebrated as Zanga in Lord Orrery's *Mustapha*; James Nokes, originally a toymaker in Cornhill, famous for his bawling fops and his "good company," and Cave Underhill, another finished comedian.

The women were Mrs. Davenport, who created the part of Roxolana in Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes* and left the stage to become the mistress of Aubrey de Vere, the twentieth and last Earl of Oxford; Mary Saunderson, a famous Juliet, afterwards the wife of Betterton; Mrs. Long, the mistress of the Duke of Richmond, celebrated for the elegance of her appearance in men's clothes; Mary or Moll Davis, excellent in both singing and dancing, who enjoyed for a short time the favour

* Cunningham says that Mrs. Knipp, who was the wife of a Smithfield horse-dealer, whom Pepys describes as "an ill, melancholy, jealous-looking fellow" suspected of ill-treating her, was the mistress of the diarist, but it is doubtful if their intimacy ever exceeded the bounds of flirtation. The worthy Samuel, we suspect, was more of a philanderer than a libertine, and he certainly stood very much in awe of Mrs. Pepys, as witness the following: "But that which troubled me most was that Knepp (*sic*) sent by Moll to desire to speak to me after the play, and she beckoned to me at the end of the play; but it was so late that, *for fear of my wife coming home before me*, I was forced to go straight home, which troubled me."

of the King, and Mrs. Johnson, who likewise excelled as a dancer and was famous for her performance of the part of Carolina in Shadwell's comedy, *Epsom Wells*.

The old stock plays were divided by the two companies. Thus, of Shakespeare's, Killigrew had *Othello*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Henry the Fourth*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; while Davenant had *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry the Eighth*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*. When, however, we read that *The Tempest* was turned into an opera, and *Romeo and Juliet* given a happy ending, which was played on alternate nights with the tragic one, to cater for the palates of the less sentimental playgoers, it must be admitted that the masterpieces of the old dramatists were treated with a sad lack of respect.

The fact is that the patrons of the Restoration theatre seem to have vastly preferred the modern drama to that of the past,* and certainly a period which produced not only a Dryden and a Wycherley, but such capable playwrights as Sir Robert Howard, Sir Charles Sedley, Davenant, Killigrew, Cowley, Etherege and Lord Orrery was a great one itself. Unhappily, its art reflected only too clearly the licentious morals of the age, and was characterized by such studied indecencies that, at the performance of a new comedy, ladies seldom attended, or, if they did, came masked.

The wits of Charles found easier way to fame,
Nor wished for Jonson's art or Shakespeare's flame;
Themselves they studied—as they felt they writ—
Intrigue was plot, obscenity was wit.

* Pepys describes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as "the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever he saw in his life."

In the pit, with their backs to the stage, stood the orange-girls, each with her basket of shining fruit on her arm. The price of oranges was very high, usually sixpence apiece,* and the same price appears to have been paid thirty years later.

"Half-crown the play, sixpence my orange, cost"

says one of the characters in Mrs. Behn's *Young King*, produced in 1698. It was considered beneath the dignity of a gentleman to haggle over the price, and it was the mode to offer the finest orange to the nearest masked lady. With "the pert damsels with their china-ware,"† the gallants of the town were accustomed to bandy their jests, which, as may be imagined, were not always of the most delicate description, and they would appear to have been employed pretty frequently in carrying *billets-doux* to and fro between the pit and the wings. The mistress or superior of the girls, was familiarly known as Orange Moll, and was acquainted with all the gossip of the green-room. Pepys would occasionally have "a great deal of discourse with Orange Moll;" and, as we have seen, the fascinating Mrs. Knipp, when she desired to speak to the Clerk of the Acts, sent Moll with the message.

On Monday, April 3, 1665, the tragedy of *Mustapha*, the work of that noble playwright the Earl of Orrery, was being performed at the Duke's Theatre. Betterton

* In France, however, the price of oranges would appear to have been much higher; for the son in Molière's *l'Avaro* speaks of purchasing China oranges for his mistress as though they were a costly delicacy.

† D'Urfey, Preface to *A Fool's Prefarment*, 1688.

played the part of Solymon, his wife that of Roxolana, in place of Mrs. Davenport, whom the Earl of Oxford had taken from the stage, first to deceive by a mock marriage and afterwards to desert, Harris the title-part, and Moll Davis, whose bright eyes and pretty figure had already, it was whispered, begun to attract the attention of the King, that of the Queen of Hungary. Great care had been taken to produce this now long-forgotten tragedy with the utmost magnificence, and new scenery had been expressly painted for it. But, according to Pepys, who was among the audience, "all the pleasure of the play was that the King and Lady Castlemaine were present, and pretty, witty Nelly at [*i. e.* of] the King's House and the younger [Rebecca] Marshall sat next us, which pleased me mightily."

On December 8, 1666, the diarist visited the rival playhouse to witness a performance of *The English Monsieur*, by the Hon. Robert Howard, a son of the Earl of Berkshire, Dryden's brother-in-law, and writes as follows :

"Myself to the King's playhouse, which troubles me, since it hath cost me a forfeit of ten shillings, which I have paid, and there did see a good part of *The English Monsieur*, which is a mighty pretty play, very witty and pleasant. And the women do very well, and above all little Nelly."

Some weeks later, Pepys attended the Drury Lane playhouse on the occasion of a performance of *The Humourous Lieutenant* of Beaumont and Fletcher, which he stigmatizes as "a silly play," though he admits that Mrs. Knipp's singing pleased him. He appears, however, to have found abundant consolation for his

disappointment when the curtain fell, for Mrs. Knipp took him and his friends behind the scenes and "brought us to Nelly, a most pretty woman, who acted the great part of Cœlia to-day very fine. I kissed her, and so did my wife; and a mighty pretty soul she is. We also saw Mrs. Hall, which is my little Roman-nosed black girl, that is mighty pretty: she is usually called Betty.* Knipp made us stay in a box and see the dancing preparatory to to-morrow for *The Goblins*, a play of Suckling, not acted these twenty-five years;† which was pretty; and so away, pleased with this sight also, and specially kissing of Nelly."

The Nelly mentioned in the above passages, to kiss whom gave the writer so much pleasure that, as an historian has aptly remarked, it was certainly just as well that Mrs. Pepys was present on this occasion, was Nell Gwyn, one of the few queens of the left hand who not only enjoyed a great popularity during her lifetime, but for whom posterity has always preserved a warm corner in its heart.

According to a horoscope of her, which has been assigned to Lilly, and is preserved among the Ashmole papers in the Museum at Oxford, Nell Gwyn was born on February 2, 1650-1; but the place of her birth is uncertain. Cunningham says that, when he was at Oxford, a certain Dr. John Ireland, an antiquary, assured him that she was born in the university town, and even named the parish, but there does not appear to be any support for this story, beyond the fact that two of the titles of her son, the Duke of St. Albans—

* She was the mistress of Sir Robert Howard.

† Suckling's play was first played in 1646 at the Blackfriars Theatre.

Headington and Burford—were taken from Oxford localities. Another tradition ascribes it to the Cole-Yard in Drury Lane, a low alley situated on the east or City side of the Lane near the Holborn end.

"The life of Nelly truly shown
From Cole-yard or Celler to the throne,"

wrote Sir George Etherege in his *Lady of Pleasure*, a bitter satire on Nell. But, since Nell undoubtedly passed her early years in Drury Lane, there is an obvious reason why her birth should be associated with it, and none appear to have urged the claims of the Cole-Yard with any force. A third tradition makes Hereford her birthplace, and the inhabitants of the capital of the cider county seem anxious to claim her as their own. Thus the name of the street in which stood the house where she is supposed to have been born was towards the end of the last century changed from Pipewell Lane to Gwyn Street, and in 1883 the then Bishop of Hereford gave his consent to the fixing of a memorial tablet to Nell Gwyn on the outer face of his garden, to mark the site of this house, which had been pulled down in 1859. The preponderance of modern opinion may be said to be in favour of Hereford—the birthplace, by the way, of the greatest of English actors, David Garrick—but that is not saying much, as there is little or no evidence either way.

The same uncertainty applies to Nell's paternity. When she had become prosperous, some subservient person found her a coat-of-arms, and her father is said to have been one Captain Thomas Gwyn, "of an ancient family in Wales." The name Gwyn is certainly of

Welsh origin, and, since Hereford is so near to Wales, this is an argument in favour of the tradition that she was born in that city. But, from the sordid circumstances of her early life, it seems much more probable that her father was a man of humble origin.* In a catchpenny "Life of Eleanor Gwinn," published in 1752, she is said to have been the daughter of a tradesman in mean circumstances.

Of Nell's mother more is known. She lived for a while with her daughter in Pall Mall, but at the time of her death, in 1679, she was living at the Neat Houses at Chelsea. Here she fell into the water and was drowned, and ill-natured persons declared that she was intoxicated at the time.

"Dy'd drunk with brandy on a common-shore"

wrote Etherege in the satire referred to; while a black-bordered broadside was circulated entitled, "An Elegy upon that never-to-be-forgotten Matron, Old Maddam Gwinn, who was unfortunately drowned in her own Fishpond on the 29th of July, 1679." Mrs. Gwyn's Christian name was Helena, but her maiden name is unknown. A monument to her memory, erected by her daughter in the south aisle of the old church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, states that she was born in that parish,† and this is, to some extent, a reason for supposing that Nell Gwyn was also born in London.

* Mr. H. B. Wheatley, Introduction to Cunningham's "Story of Nell Gwyn" (edit. 1903).

† The inscription on the monument was as follows: "Here lies interred the body of Helena Gwyn, born in this parish, who departed this life y^e 20th of July MDCLXXIX, in the LVII year of her age." When the church was rebuilt, the monument disappeared.

The only other near relation known to us is her sister Rose Gwyn, whose name is mentioned in a sedan chairman's bill, found among Nell's papers after her death, and in the codicil to her will. She married a Captain John Cassells, a man, it is said, of some fortune, who spent it in the service of the Crown and died in 1675, leaving her penniless. Charles II. gave her a pension of £200 a year, which she continued to receive until the accession of William and Mary. Some time before 1687 she married a Mr. Forster, and is mentioned in her sister's will as "Mrs. Rose Forster." Some persons have supposed that she was identical with a certain Rose Gwyn who was arrested for theft in 1663, and sent to Newgate, but subsequently released, because "her father had lost all in the royal cause." But of this there is no confirmatory evidence, and it should be remembered that the name Gwyn is by no means an uncommon one, and that there are many instances of persons bearing it who were in no way related to Nell Gwyn.

Nothing is known with certainty as to Nell Gwyn's early years, except that they were passed amid squalid, and even worse, surroundings. She lived in the Cole-Yard with her mother, and we can imagine her spending a good part of her time in playing about the courts and alleys of the vicinity, with other dirty and scantily-clothed, but merry and light-hearted, children. Those years left a mark upon her which was never to be effaced, and whether as popular actress or King's mistress, Nell Gwyn, with her animal spirits, her quickness of repartee, her vulgarity, her good-nature, and her sublime disregard of the conventionalities, was always at heart the *gamin* of Drury Lane.

What was the next phase in Nell's life—and it was indeed a horrible one—we learn from a passage in Pepys :

“ Mr. Pierce tells me,” he writes, “ that the two Marshalls at the King's House are Stephen Marshall's, the great Presbyter's daughters ; * and that Nelly and Beck Marshall falling out the other day, the latter called the other my Lord Buckhurst's mistress. Nell answered her : ‘ I was but one man's mistress, though I was brought up in a brothel to fill strong waters to the gentlemen ; and you are a mistress to three or four, though a praying Presbyter's daughter. ’ ”

The house referred to by Nell is believed to have been one kept by an infamous woman named Ross, and to have been situated in Leuknor Lane, the next turning in Drury Lane to the Cole-Yard. It was this woman's practice to entrap young girls, whom she trained for her foul purposes ; but, until they were old enough to submit to their final degradation, they were sent dressed as orange-girls to sell fruit at the adjoining theatres.

“ But first the basket her fair arm did suit
Laden with pippins and Hesperian fruit ;
This first step raised, to the wondering pit she sold
The lovely fruit smiling with streaks of gold.” †

It was in the pit at the King's Theatre that Nell plied her trade, and we can well believe that her appearance excited the wonder of which the poet speaks. She was now apparently in her fifteenth year, small but exquisitely graceful, with reddish-brown hair, sparkling blue eyes, which, when she laughed, became almost

* This, as we have mentioned elsewhere, is incorrect.

† Earl of Rochester, *A Panegyrick on Nelly*.

invisible, very white teeth, and tiny but perfectly shaped feet.

The girl's unusual attractions saved her from the terrible fate which might otherwise have awaited her. Oldys, in the account of her life which he wrote for Curll's *History of the English Stage*, states that a certain Robert Duncan, whom he believes to have been a merchant, took a fancy to her from her smart wit, fine shape, and the smallness of her feet, and introduced her to the stage. This is confirmed by Etherege in his satire, *The Lady of Pleasure*, who adds that in after years, Nell used her influence to obtain for Duncan a commission in the Guards. In the opinion of Cunningham, the name of this patron of Nell was not Duncan, but Dongan, and he was identical with a Dongan mentioned by Anthony Hamilton in his *Mémoires* of Gramont as having succeeded Duras, afterwards Earl of Feversham, in the post of lieutenant in the Duke's Life Guards. He adds that he had ascertained from official documents that there was a Robert Dungan, a lieutenant in the Duke's Life Guards, who died in or before 1669.

Whatever truth there may be in this story, and whether or no the mysterious Duncan or Dungan was Nell's lover, as some have supposed, it is certain that the girl received her training for the profession in which she was soon to occupy so prominent a place from the actor Charles Hart, with perhaps some assistance from his colleague, John Lacy, the leading comedian of the King's Theatre.

Mr. Cecil Chesterton, who persists in seeing everything connected with Nell through rose-coloured spectacles, is very angry with Rochester and Etherege,

who assert that Hart exacted a price for his assistance, and declares that "there is absolutely no shadow of evidence to support such a charge." But Rochester and Etherege were not alone in making it ; and, as Nell herself on one occasion was heard to call Charles II. her Charles the *third*—meaning that her first lover was Charles Hart, her second Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, and afterwards Earl of Dorset, of whom we shall speak presently, and her third Charles Stuart—there would not appear to be very much doubt about the matter.

CHAPTER III

NELL GWYN AND LORD BUCKHURST

THERE can be little doubt that Nell Gwyn was a born *comédienne*, and a *comédienne* whose qualities were peculiarly suited to the lively, witty, and decidedly "broad" comedy of the Restoration. In tragedy, on the other hand, for which she was quite unfitted, she appears to have been a dismal failure, and Pepys, so enthusiastic an admirer of her farcical impersonations, condemns her performance of tragic parts in unmeasured terms. Thus, when on August 22, 1667, he saw her in the part of Cydaria, Montezuma's daughter, in Dryden's *Indian Emperor*, he expressed his opinion that it was quite unsuitable for her, and that she did it "most basely." Neither was he any better pleased when he saw her again in this character some weeks later (November 11, 1667), since he informs us that "Nell's ill-speaking of a great part made him mad," nor yet with her acting as Samira in Robert Howard's *Surprisa!*, on December 26, a part which, he says, she spoiled.

Nell herself was fully conscious of her own limitations, and several of the epilogues written for her by Dryden

and others, in the delivery of which she probably surpassed any other actress of her time, expressed her dislike of "serious parts."

"I know you in your hearts
Hate serious plays—as I hate serious parts,"

she says in the epilogue to that very dull play *The Duke of Lerma*, which Pepys assures us she spoke "most excellently." And again, in the epilogue to Dryden's *Tyrannick Love* :

"I die
Out of my calling in a tragedy."

Nell's first appearance on the stage took place in 1665, in the very part in Dryden's *Indian Emperor* in which her acting so disgusted the critical Mr. Pepys when he saw her two years later. But we have no record of what parts she undertook in the interval between this and her appearance in James Howard's *English Monsieur* at the end of the following year, to which reference has already been made. The part which she took, that of Lady Wealthy, a rich widow, with a good heart and a rich vein of humour, was one peculiarly adapted to her talents, and had in all probability been expressly written for her ; and she no doubt well deserved the praise bestowed upon her by Pepys.

At the beginning of 1666-7, Nell, as we have seen, scored another success as Celia in *The Humourous Lieutenant* of Beaumont and Fletcher, a play that was long a favourite with the public, and was frequently acted throughout the reign of Charles II. But her greatest triumph was achieved a fortnight later, in the part of Florimel in Dryden's tragi-comedy of *Secret Love*, or

The Maiden Queen. The plot of this admirable play, which is generally considered the best which Dryden ever wrote, had been suggested to the author by the King, who called it "his play." The *dramatis personæ* consisted, singularly enough, of eight female and only three male parts, that of Celadon being played by Hart.

The play was produced on February 2, 1666-7, before a crowded and distinguished audience, which included the King and the Duke of York—and Mr. and Mrs. Pepys, and met with a very cordial reception, for not only had the author surpassed himself, but he was most fortunate in his interpreters, all the parts being admirably acted. Particularly excellent were Hart, in the character of Celadon, and Nell, in that of Florimel. The latter, indeed, had to sustain the chief burden of the piece, and was seldom off the stage, while in the fifth act she appeared in boy's clothes, and danced a jig to the great delight of the audience. The enthusiasm of Pepys at Nell's acting knew no bounds. "The truth is," he says, "there is a comical part done by Nell, which is Florimel, that I never can hope to see the like done again by man or woman. . . . So great performance of a comical part was never, I believe, in the world before as Nell did this, both as a mad girl, then most and best of all when she comes in as a young gallant, and hath the motion and carriage of a spark the most that ever I saw any man have. It makes me, I confess, admire her." Nor, though he witnessed the play on two subsequent occasions, did the Clerk of the Acts find cause to modify this opinion. He calls it, after his second visit on March 25, an "excellent play, and so done by Nell her merry part as cannot be better done in nature;" while after

his third visit, two months later, he declares that "it is impossible to have Florimel's part, which is the most comical that ever was made, ever done better than it is by Nelly."

Nell's success upon the stage had by this time raised her far above the degrading surroundings of her early years. She still lived in Drury Lane, but it was at the fashionable—the Strand end—of that thoroughfare, where stood the town residences of the Earl of Anglesey, long Lord Privy Seal, and the Earls of Clare and Craven, after whom Clare Market and Craven Yard were named. The house in which she lodged, which was pulled down in 1891, but has since been rebuilt, stood opposite the gate of Craven House, at the top of Maypole Alley; and from it could be seen the great Maypole in the Strand, surmounted by a crown and vane with the royal arms richly gilded, which, after being hewn down by the Puritans, had been set up again immediately after the Restoration, amid great rejoicings. Here it was that Pepys saw her on May Day, 1667, and the sight seems to have left a very pleasant impression on his mind.

"Thence to Westminster," he writes, "in the way, meeting many milkmaids, with their garlands upon their pails, dancing with a fiddler before them, and saw pretty Nelly standing at her lodgings' door in Drury Lane, in her smock sleeves and bodice, looking upon them. She seemed a mighty pretty creature."

A mighty pretty creature she seemed to a good many other persons beside the Clerk of the Acts, as will be gathered from another passage from the same writer :

"Thence called Knepp from the King's House,

where, going in for her, the play being done, I saw Beck Marshall come dressed off the stage and look mighty fine and pretty and noble ; and also Nell in her boy's clothes, mighty pretty. But Lord ! their confidence, and *how many men do hover about them* as soon as they come off the stage, and how confident they are in their talk ! ” *

Men have hovered about actresses at all times, sometimes with honourable or at least innocent, but far more often, we fear, with other, intentions ; but there could be no possible doubt as to the intentions of the gentlemen of whom Pepys speaks. For the women of the playhouses of the Restoration were regarded as ladies of very easy virtue indeed, and ready enough to pick up any handkerchief that might be thrown to them, provided the owner, either on account of rank or wealth or good looks, happened to find favour in their sight. One has only to turn to the prologues or epilogues of the plays of that period to find that the excessive sensibility of the actress was a common topic with the dramatist, who bewails it, not so much on moral grounds, as because it tended to make them proud and insolent, and despise their calling, and sometimes to deprive the stage of their services altogether. Davenant, foreseeing these inconveniences, boarded his four principal actresses in his own house, but, with the single exception of Mary Saunderson, who became the wife of Betterton, the precaution proved altogether ineffective.

Such being the moral atmosphere of the theatre, it was only to be expected that Nell should sooner or later surrender to the importunities of one of her

* May 7, 1668.

numerous admirers ; but it certainly says something for the good taste of the ex-orange-girl that the favoured lover should have been regarded as the best-bred man of his age.

"Mr Pierce tells us," writes Pepys, "under date July 13, 1667, that my Lord Buckhurst hath got Nell away from the King's House, lives with her, and gives her £100 a year, so as she hath sent her parts to the house, and will act no more."

Among the reckless, witty, profligate courtiers of the Restoration, no figure is more interesting than that of Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, afterwards the magnificent Earl of Dorset. The eldest son of Richard Sackville, fifth Earl of Dorset, and Frances, daughter of Lionel Cranfield, fifth Earl of Middlesex, he was born on January 24, 1637-8, and was therefore at this time in his thirty-first year. Probably, owing to the confusion of the times, he was not sent to either University, but educated under private tutors, and spent some time in Italy. Returning to England at the Restoration, he was elected to the House of Commons, as member for East Grinstead ; "but," says his profound admirer, the courtly Prior, "turned his parts rather to books and conversation than to politics." In other words, he became a courtier, a wit, and a profligate, and for some years seems to have led a very dissipated life. In February, 1662-3, he and his brother Edward and three other gentlemen were arrested on a charge of robbing and killing a tanner named Hoppy, near Newington, and lodged in Newgate. Their defence was that they mistook Hoppy for a highwayman whom they were pursuing, and the money which they found

upon him for stolen property ; and the prosecution was dropped. In the following year, he was mixed up with Sir Charles Sedley, the poet, author of that charming lyric, "Phillis is my only joy," but in his youthful days the most abandoned rake about town, in a disgraceful drunken frolic at the notorious Cock Tavern, in Bow Street, kept by a woman called Oxford Kate. For this escapade, Pepys tells us, Sedley received "a most high reproof" from the Lord Chief Justice, who informed him that "it was for him and such wicked wretches as he was that God's anger and judgments hung over them ;" and his lordship also animadverted very severely on the conduct of Lord Buckhurst, remarking that "it would have more become him to have been at his prayers, begging God's forgiveness [for the death of the tanner Hoppy] than now running into such courses again." According to Pepys, Sedley was bound over in the sum of £5,000.*

Buckhurst found better employment for his energies shortly afterwards by volunteering for the fleet fitted out against the Dutch and taking an honourable part

* Dr. Johnson, in the biography of Charles Sackville in his "Lives of the Poets," gives the following account of this affair :

"Sackville, who was then Lord Buckhurst, with Sir Charles Sedley and Sir Thomas Ogle, got drunk at the Cock, in Bow Street, by Covent Garden, and going into the balcony, exposed themselves to the populace in very indecent postures. At last, as they grew warmer, Sedley stood forth naked, and harangued the populace in such profane language that the public indignation was awakened ; the crowd attempted to force the door, drove in the performers with stones, and broke the windows of the house. For this misdemeanour they were indicted, and Sedley was fined five hundred pounds ; what was the sentence of the others is not known. Sedley employed [Henry] Killigrew and another to procure a remission from the King, but [mark the friendship of the dissolute !] they begged the fine for themselves and exacted it to the last groat."



CHARLES SACKVILLE, EARL OF DORSET
(LORD BUCKHURST)

From an engraving after S. Harding

in the great naval battle of June 3rd, 1663. On this occasion he composed his famous song, "To all you ladies now at land," an admitted masterpiece of its kind.*

On his return, he resumed his dissolute course of life, and in 1668 we find Pepys classing him with Sedley as a pattern rake, "running up and down all night, almost naked, through the streets; and at last fighting and being beat by the watch and clapped up all night." Yet, rake and madcap though he was, Buckhurst possessed great qualities. He had a genuine love of literature, and not only wrote verses of undeniable merit, "the effusions of a man of wit, gay, vigorous, and airy,"† as Dr. Johnson describes them, and some of the severest and most refined satires we possess, but was the friend of all the poets of eminence of his time, as he was afterwards, when he succeeded to his father's title and estates, the most munificent patron of men of genius that this country has seen. He befriended Dryden, Butler, Wycherley and many others; he was consulted, if we may believe Prior, by Waller for verse, by Sprat for prose, and by Charles II., whose favour he retained throughout the whole of that monarch's life, touching the portraits of Sir Peter Lely. He was "the best good-hearted man," who kept open house for his friends—and surely no man ever had so many friends!—and a table furnished with an abundance which has seldom been surpassed, and at which a freedom reigned which made every one of his

* Prior states that Buckhurst actually wrote these verses on the night before the battle, b. t. according to Lord Orrery, he only retouched them.

† Dr. Johnson, "Lives of the Poets."

guests imagine himself at home. Little wonder then that he should have had a Pope to write his epitaph and a Prior his panegyric, or that the cool judgment of historians should have echoed the admiration of his contemporaries! "He was," writes Horace Walpole, "the finest gentleman of the voluptuous court of Charles II. He had as much wit as his master or his contemporaries, Buckingham and Rochester, without the royal want of feeling, the duke's want of principle, or the earl's want of thought."*

It was to Epsom that Buckhurst had carried off his mistress. The Surrey town was, of course, not yet the scene of those races which have since made it famous, but, as a health resort, it was at this period, and until nearly half a century later, only inferior in reputation to Tunbridge Wells. The waters, to the medicinal properties of which, real or imaginary,† the place was indebted for its prosperity, appear to have enjoyed a local celebrity so far back as the latter years of Queen Elizabeth; but by the middle of the seventeenth century their fame had spread far and wide, so that persons are said to have come from the Continent to drink them; while in the time of Charles II. it was a common occurrence for doctors to advise a visit to Epsom. Thus, in the Domestic State Papers, under date June 29, 1668, we read: "Chatham Dockyard. John Owen to Pepys. "I beg leave of absence for 12 days, being afflicted with . . . and advised to drink

* "Noble Authors."

† Lord Rosebery, in his interesting introduction to Mr. Gordon Home's work, "Epsom: its history and surroundings," expresses the opinion that visitors were cured of their ailments "at least as much by air, abstinence, exercise, and a healing faith" as by the virtues of the waters.

Epsom waters ;” while in the following August one Ph. Pett writes from Chatham to the Navy Commissioners : “ I beg leave for a fortnight, through ill-health, being advised by my physician to drink Epsom waters.”*

But Epsom, although royalty occasionally honoured it by its presence, and there was generally a sprinkling of courtiers among the visitors, was never a fashionable resort in the sense that Tunbridge Wells was at this time or Bath at a later date. It was the resort rather of the richer citizens of London than of the aristocracy, and the haberdashers and comfit-makers of Shadwell’s comedy of *Epsom Wells* were much more in evidence there than their customers who dwelt west of Temple Bar.

At Epsom the lovers installed themselves in a house adjoining the King’s Head Inn,† with Buckhurst’s boon companion, Sedley, to bear them company and help them make game of the pursy “cits” and their wives as they passed by on their way to the wells. “To the King’s Head [Epsom],” writes Pepys, under date July 14, “where our coachman carried us, and there had an

✓ • Cited by Mr. Gordon Home, “Epsom : its history and surroundings.”

† Mr. Gordon Home’s book contains an interesting note on this house :

“This house next door to the King’s Head, where Nelly stayed, is still standing, the ground floor being utilised as a grocer’s shop. Unfortunately, the interior has been altered too much to leave anything suggestive of that time, and one is forced to be content with knowing that the Court favourite occupied two little bay-windowed rooms overlooking the street, one of them being used as a bedroom and the other as a sitting-room. During a comparatively recent alteration, a very small doorway was discovered in one of the walls of the left-hand room as one faces the building. This might have been used as a secret entrance or exit ; but it is entirely covered up with plaster and wall-paper now, so that it is impossible to examine it without having the wall pulled to pieces.”

ill room for us to go into, but the best in the house that was not taken up. Here we called for drink and bespoke dinner, and heard that my lord Buckhurst and Nelly are lodged at the next house, and Sir Charles Sidly [Sedley] with them, and keep a merry house. Poor girl! I pity her, but more the loss of her at the King's House."

These three lively sparks did not keep merry house long at Epsom, though, while they did, we can well believe that it must have been a very merry house indeed, with something doubtless much more sustaining than the beverage for which the town was then famed flowing pretty freely to assist the flow of wit of perhaps the wittiest woman and two of the wittiest men of their time. For the love-affair of Buckhurst and Nell was but a midsummer madness; by August his fickle lordship had already had enough of his new inamorata, and before the end of the month Nell was back at the King's Theatre, playing some of her old parts. Pepys was somewhat premature in deploring the fact that she was lost to the stage.

"To the King's playhouse," writes our diarist on August 26, "and saw *The Surprisal*, a very mean play, I thought; or else it was because I was out of humour; and but very little company in the house. Sir W. Pen and I had a great deal of discourse with [Orange] Moll, she tells us that Nell is already left by my Lord Buckhurst, and that he makes sport of her, and swears that she hath had all she could get of him; and Hart, her great admirer, now hates her; and that she is very poor, and hath lost my Lady Castlemaine, who was her

great friend also ; but she is come to the house, but is neglected by them all."

Poor Nell's life at this period would not appear to have been a very happy one. Her conquest of so desirable an admirer as my Lord Buckhurst must have caused a good many heartburnings in the green-room, and its abrupt termination would afford her jealous colleagues too tempting an opportunity for venting their spleen to be neglected. But what the girl, proud as she was of the success she had so early achieved in her profession, must have found even harder to bear than the spiteful remarks that were aimed at her—for her powers of repartee would enable her to give a good deal more than she took in a battle of tongues—was the fact that Hart, indignant at her leaving the theatre, or himself, or both, took the mean revenge of thrusting upon her those serious parts for which, as he very well knew, she was quite unsuited, and in which she so disgusted the critical Mr. Pepys. Fortunately, however, Hart, in the interests of the theatre, could not continue this for long, and, after a few weeks, Nell resumed her comedy rôles and speedily recovered her former popularity.

Under date October 5, Pepys gives us another little miniature portrait of Nell and of life behind the scenes of the King's Theatre :

"To the King's House and there going in met with Knipp and she took us into the tireing rooms ; and to the women's shift, where Nell was dressing herself,* and was all unready, and is very pretty, prettier than I thought. And so walked all up and down the house

* As *Flora*, in *Flora's Vagaries*, a comedy attributed to Rhodes.

and then below into the scene-room, and there sat down, and she gave us fruit ; and here I read the questions to Knipp, while she answered me through all the part of *Flora's Figgarys* (*sic*), which was acted to-day. But, Lord ! to see how they were both painted would make a man mad, and did make me loath them ; and what base company of men comes among them, and how loudly they talk ! and how poor the men are in clothes, and yet what a show they make on the stage by candle-light, is very observable. But to see how Nell cursed for having so few people in the pit was pretty ; the other house carrying away all the people, and is said now-a-days to have generally most company, as being the better players."

The attraction at "The Duke's" which was drawing people away from the other house and causing Nell to use such forcible language was the singing and dancing of little Miss Davis in a piece called *The Rivals*, a new version by Davenant of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, of Beaumont and Fletcher, or rather of Fletcher alone. It had been produced in 1664, but would not appear to have met with any great success until the author conceived the idea of giving the part of Celania, "a shepherdess mad for love," to Moll Davis, who danced a jig and sang a song, both of which found their way direct to the susceptible heart of the Merry Monarch, in which there was at that moment a vacant corner, caused by the departure of the beautiful and discreet Frances Stuart, who, to escape the royal importunities, had fled from the Court and married the Duke of Richmond. The jig, according to Cunningham, was probably some French importation, or nothing more than a rustic



MISS DAVIS
From an engraving after Harding.

measure with a few foreign innovations ; but the song, which has much ballad beauty to recommend it, has come down to us.

My lodging is on the cold ground,
And very hard is my fare,
But that which troubles me most is
The unkindness of my dear.
Yet still I cry, O turn, love,
And I prythee, love, turn to me,
For thou art the man that I long for,
And alack, what remedy !

I'll crown thee with a garland of straw, then,
And I'll marry thee with a rush ring ;
My frozen hopes shall thaw then,
And merrily we will sing.
O turn to me, my dear love,
And I prythee, love, turn to me,
For thou art the man that alone canst
Procure my liberty.

But if thou wilt harden thy heart still
And be deaf to my pitiful moan,
Then I must endure the smart still
And tumble in straw alone.
Yet still I cry, O turn, love,
And I prythee, love, turn to me,
For thou art the man that alone art
The cause of my misery.

The King was so much touched by the woes of the lovelorn Celania that he shortly afterwards persuaded her to exchange her lodging on the cold ground for a luxuriously-furnished house in Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, and " married " her, not with a rush-ring, but with one which is said to have cost £700, and which the little lady lost no opportunity of displaying to the eyes of her admiring and envious friends.

Moll Davis is believed to have had good blood in her

veins, since Colonel Charles Howard, afterwards second Earl of Berkshire, is said to have been her father, though a blacksmith named Davis, of Charlton, in Wiltshire, near which stood the family-seat of the Howards, also claimed that distinction. Since the colonel's brothers, Robert and Edward, were both interested in the stage, the connection may possibly have facilitated her advancement in the royal favour.

Good blood or no, this advancement appears to have caused great resentment in certain quarters of the Court. The Queen, not yet schooled to indifference to the vices of her volatile husband, was highly indignant, and when Miss Davis was dancing one of her favourite jigs in a play at Whitehall, her Majesty rose and "would not stay to see it." Lady Castlemaine, who had been overjoyed at the marriage of her involuntary rival, Frances Stuart, was still more incensed and made no attempt to conceal it. Pepys relates how, one day at "The Duke's," Moll was seated in a box immediately over the royal box, in which were the King and Lady Castlemaine, and how when the King appeared to be far more interested in what was going on above than on the stage, her ladyship looked up to see who was there, and, "when she saw Moll Davis, she looked like fire, which troubled me."

Since Charles had had the execrable taste to prefer an actress to herself, the exasperated sultana endeavoured to "get even" with him by extending her favour to an actor, to wit, Charles Hart, whom she visited quite openly at his own house. But his Majesty did not seem to mind very much. He was getting used to her ladyship's infidelities.

CHAPTER IV

"THE KING SENDS FOR NELLY"

TOWARDS the end of December, Nell Gwyn achieved another great success, as Mirida in James Howard's *All Mistaken, or The Mad Couple*, one of those broad-comedy parts which suited her so admirably. "To the King's House," writes Pepys, "and there saw the *Mad Couple*, which is but an ordinary play; but only Nell and Hart's mad parts are most excellently done, but especially hers; which makes it a miracle to me to think how ill she do any serious part, as the other day, just like a fool or a changeling; and in a mad part do beyond all imitation almost."*

The scene which appears to have aroused the most enthusiasm was one in which the song and the incident which had caused the removal of little Miss Davis from her lodging on the cold ground to the luxuriously-furnished one in Suffolk Street was very cleverly parodied. Hart, as Pinquisier, an abnormally fat man, whose adipose tissue is a sore obstacle to his love-making, sobs his complaints into the ear of his inamorata, the madcap Mirida.

Mirida—Dear love, come sit thee in my lap, and let me know if I can enclose thy world of love and fat within these arms. See, I cannot nigh compass my desire by a mile.

* Pepys, December 28, 1667.

Pinquisier—How is my fat a rival to my joys !
 Sure I shall weep it all away. [Weeps.]

Mirida—

Lie still, my babe, lie still and sleep,
 It grieves me sore to see thee weep.
 Wert thou but leaner, I were glad,
 Thy fatness makes thy dear love sad.

What a lump of love have I in my arms !

My lodging is on the cold boards,
 And wonderful hard is my fare,
 But that which troubles me most is
 The fatness of my dear.

Yet still I cry, Oh melt, love,
 And I prythee now melt apace,
 For thou art the man I should long for
 If 'twere not for thy grease.

Pinquisier—

Then prythee don't harden thy heart still,
 And be deaf to my pitiful moan,
 Since I do endure thy smart still,
 And for my fat do groan.
 Then prythee now turn, my dear love,
 And I prythee now turn to me,
 For alas ! I am too fat still
 To roll so far to thee.

Then *Pinquisier* proceeds to roll towards *Mirida*, who rolls away to escape him every time he draws near her—a proceeding which appears to have provoked the greatest mirth amongst the audience.

We do not know whether the parody appealed to Charles II. as much as the song, but, any way, he seems to have been of opinion that the charming *Mirida* was deserving of a less adipose admirer than poor *Pinquisier*, for at the beginning of the following year a report arose that “the King had sent for Nelly.” But let us listen to the Clerk of the Acts :

"To the King's House, there to see *The Wild-Goose Chase*.* Knepp came and sat by us, and the talk pleased me a little, she telling me that Miss Davis is for certain going away from the Duke's House, the King being in love with her, and a house is taken for her and furnishing; and she hath a ring given her worth £600; that the King did send several times for Nelly, and she was with him, but what he did she knows not; this was a good while ago;† and she says that the King first spoiled Mrs. Weaver, which is very mean, methinks, in a prince, and I am sorry for it, and can hope for no good to the State, from having a prince so devoted to his pleasure."‡

* A play by Beaumont and Fletcher, first acted in 1632 and published in 1652.

† According to Cunningham, Nell first attracted the King's attention in the part of Alizia, or Alice, Piers, the mistress of Edward III., in *The Black Prince* of the Earl of Orrery, produced at the King's House on October 19 in the preceding year, in which she declaimed the following lines which "must have often in after life occurred to her recollection, not from their poetry, which is little enough, but from their particular applicability to her own story :

You know, dear friend, when to this court I came,
My eyes did all our bravest youth inflame;
And in that happy state I lived awhile,
When Fortune did betray me with a smile;
Or rather Love against my peace did fight;
And to revenge his power, which I did alight,
Made Edward our victorious monarch be
One of those many who did sigh for me.
All other flame but his I did deride;
They rather made my trouble than my pride:
But this, when told me, made me quickly know,
Love is a god to which all hearts must bow."

This, if it were really the case, would be a most interesting coincidence, but unfortunately Mr. Wheatley, in one of his footnotes to the 1903 edition of the author's work, points out that it is by no means certain that it was Nell who acted the part of Alice Piers. For, though Downes, in his *Roscius Anglicanus*, says that the part was played by a "Mrs. Gwin," he probably refers to an Anne Quyn, another actress at the King's House, who is constantly confounded with "Mrs. Ellen Gwin," as he invariably describes Nell.

‡ Pepys, January 11, 1667-8.

The rumour that Nell had been summoned to the royal presence, was followed by a report that she was about to give his Majesty a pledge of her gratitude, but this was difficult to reconcile with her continued appearances upon the stage, in *The Duke of Lerma*, by Sir Robert Howard—a play, Pepys tells us, “designed to reproach the King with his mistresses”—in which she spoke the prologue “most excellently”—as Vabria in Dryden’s *Tyrannick Love, or The Royal Martyr*, and as Donna Jacintha in the same dramatist’s comedy of *An Evening’s Love, or The Mock Astrologer*. At the same time, rumours were afloat to the effect that my Lord Buckhurst’s departure on a complimentary mission to the French Court was nothing but a “sleeveless errand” designed to get him out of the way and leave the field clear for his royal rival, and that his appointment as groom of the King’s Bedchamber, with a pension of a thousand pounds a year, was by way of being a solatium for the loss of his inamorata. Which appears rather hard upon his lordship, whose affection for Nell would not appear to have survived their July “jaunt” to Epsom, though we cannot agree with the late Mr. Dutton Cook, who, in an article in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (May, 1883), endeavours to prove that Buckhurst was “not the man to sell his mistress.” In an age when a King was prepared to sell his country, or, at any rate, its honour, his courtiers were not likely to stick at selling a mistress.

Towards the end of 1668, or the beginning of the following year, Nell removed from Drury Lane to a house in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, where the King appears to have visited her pretty frequently, though not openly ;

while the girl, on her side, was reported to have been summoned occasionally to Whitehall. The *liaison* was not, however, an established fact until the last week of 1669, when the time was drawing near for the production of a new tragedy by Dryden, *The Conquest of Granada*, in which Nell had been cast for the important part of Almahide, a maiden whose beauty captivates the Moorish king. It was too dignified a part to promise her much of a success, but, by way of compensation, Dryden had written for her a witty prologue, which was confidently expected to take the town by storm. However, a few days before the day fixed for the production of the play, it was ascertained that the approach of an interesting domestic event would not allow of Mrs. Eleanor Gwyn undertaking the part, and, to the great disappointment of the public, the play had to be postponed. By a singular coincidence, the management of the Duke's Theatre, where a new piece was also announced for production, found themselves in a similar predicament, Miss Davis being incapacitated from appearing for the same reason as her rival in the affections of the King and the public. It is to be feared that such a *contre-temps* must have entailed a severe strain on the loyalty of both authors and actors.

When *The Conquest of Granada* was at length produced, which was not until the autumn of 1670, Dryden alluded to this double postponement in his epilogue :

Think him not duller for the year's delay :
He was prepared, the women were away ;
And men without their parts can hardly play.
If they through sickness seldom did appear,

Pity the virgins of each theatre ;
For at both houses 'twas a sickly year !
And pity us, your servants, to whose cost
In one such sickness nine whole months were lost.

The play was a great success, or, at any rate, the prologue was, which was spoken by Nell Gwyn "in a broad-brimmed hat and waistbelt, the broad-brimmed hat being a jest at the expense of an incident in a play recently produced at the rival playhouse." "At the Duke's Theatre," writes Waldron, in his edition of the *Roscius Anglicanus*, published in 1789, "Nokes appeared in a hat larger than Pistol's, which took the town wonderful, and supported a bad play by its fine effect. Dryden, piqued at this, caused a hat to be made the circumference of a timber coach-wheel ; and, as Nelly was low of stature, and what the French call *mignonne* or *piquante*, he made her speak under the umbrella of that hat, the brims thereof being spread out horizontally to their full extension. The whole theatre was in a convulsion of applause, nay, the very actors giggled, a circumstance none had observed before. Judge, therefore, what a condition the merriest prince alive was in at such a conjuncture ! 'Twas beyond odso and ods-fish, for he wanted little of being suffocated at such a conjuncture !"

Downes says that Charles was so delighted with Nell's performance that, after the play was over, he carried her off in his own coach to sup with him at Whitehall. And certainly Nell was entitled to some extra attention on the part of her royal admirer, since on May 8 of that year she had presented him with a son, Charles Beauclerk, the future Duke of St. Albans.

CHAPTER V

THE MERRY MONARCH

NELL GWYN was nineteen years old when she had the distinction of being "sent for by the King" in the winter of 1668-9, and the King continued to send for, or to visit, her for the remainder of his life. For, though it was only a corner of the royal heart that she was privileged to occupy, it was a very warm corner indeed. And there can be little doubt that Nell was genuinely attached to her royal "protector." While Lady Castlemaine, under the King's very eyes, ranged from peers and officers in the Guards to actors and rope-dancers,* Nell, having attained the height of her ambition, remained, for all evidence to the contrary, perfectly faithful to her "Charles the Third."

That "pretty, witty Nelly" should have attracted the monarch's vagrant fancy is not in the least surprising, but that she should have retained her hold over him to the end of his days is a fact which requires some

* Jacob Hall, the tight-rope dancer, was among those upon whom Lady Castlemaine bestowed her favours. Her ladyship saw him performing at Bartholomew Fair, Smithfield, and fell, according to Pepys, "mightily in love with him"; and in April, 1668 he was a regular visitor at her house.

explanation. She was not the first actress with whom Charles had had tender relations. There were Mrs. Weaver and Mrs. Knight and Moll Davis, but none of these affairs was of an enduring character, though little Miss Davis continued to be the object of fugitive attentions on his Majesty's part at any rate up to 1673, in which year she presented him with a daughter.* Nell, however, "the indiscreetest and wildest creature that ever was in a Court,"† continued in high favour until the King's death, and "Let not poor Nelly starve!" were Charles's last recorded words. What then is the explanation of this permanent attachment? It is, we think, that just as Barbara Villiers appealed to the animal side of Charles's nature, and Louise de K  roualle to what was refined and intellectual in him, Nell appealed to his Bohemian side—to his dislike of ceremony and constraint, to his love of ease and good-fellowship. "It was," writes one of Charles's historians, "the frank recklessness of the Latin Quarter, the fearlessness of her banter, her irrepressible gaiety, the spontaneousness of her practical jokes, her *camaraderie*, and unflinching goodness of temper which made her hold on him secure. She was a true child of the London streets, apt of wit and shrewd of tongue; and her very honesty of vice, her want of reticence, her buoyant indiscretions, her refusal to take herself seriously and regard herself as another but what she

* This girl, Mary Tudor, was acknowledged by the King. She married, in 1687, Francis Radcliffe, second Earl of Derwentwater, whose son James, the third earl, was beheaded on Tower Hill in 1716, for his share in the Jacobite rebellion of the previous year.

† Burnet, "History of My Own Time."

was, have strangely enough secured for her a sort of positive affection in the respectable England of to-day, as they did during her joyous, irresponsible life.”* If Nell, as so many women of similar origin would have done, had committed the mistake of endeavouring to play the lady, she would very speedily have bored Charles, who could, alas! have had a whole seraglio of real ladies if he wanted them. But she preferred to remain herself—“anybody,” as one of her rivals in the royal affections was once heard to remark, “might know she had been an orange-girl by her swearing”—and the contrast between his plebeian mistress and the high-bred ladies of his Court served to amuse the King for more than fifteen years.

But let us see what manner of man was this King who could find so much attraction in the society of a daughter of the people, for hitherto we have only spoken of one side of a curiously multiple character.

The popular conception of Charles II., that of a selfish, good-humoured voluptuary, “who never said a foolish thing, and never did a wise one,” is very far removed from the truth; and it is not a little strange that it should so long have survived, when we consider with what ability his character has been drawn for us by the many distinguished writers to whom he was personally known: by Clarendon and Halifax; by Evelyn and Temple; by Burnet, Dryden, and Roger North.

It is, indeed, doubtful whether any King who ever sat on the English throne was endowed by Nature with

* Mr. Osmund Airy, “Charles II.”

a keener intellect than this "tall man, above two yards high"—to quote the description of him issued after the Battle of Worcester—with his fine dark eyes, his long, swarthy, saturnine countenance, which concealed "a merry and merciful disposition,"* his dignified carriage, and his "great voice."†

Halifax praises his admirable memory and his acute powers of observation, and tells us that whenever one of his Ministers fell, the King was always at hand with a full inventory of his faults. His capacity for kingcraft, knowledge of the world, and easy address enabled him to surmount difficulties which would have proved fatal to his father or brother. "It was a common saying that he could send away a person better pleased at receiving nothing than those in the good King his father's time that had requests granted them;"‡ and his good-humoured tact and familiarity compensated in a great degree in the eyes of the nation for his many failings and preserved his popularity. He spoke French fluently, though he does not seem to have written it very idiomatically, and understood Italian. The classical side of his education would appear to have been somewhat neglected, as he is said not to have read Latin with ease. On the other hand, he was well grounded in critical and political literature, as well as in English law and divinity. He had all the hereditary love of the Stuarts for poets and poetry. He carried Butler's *Hudibras* about in his pocket and protected its publication by royal warrant,

* Savile.

† Evelyn.

‡ "Memoirs of Thomas, Earl of Aylesbury."

and suggested the Medal to Dryden as a subject for a poem while walking in the Mall. "If I were a poet," said he, "and I think I am poor enough to be one, I would write a poem on such a subject in the following manner." Dryden took the hint, carried his poem to the King, and received a hundred gold pieces for it. Like others of his race, like James I. and James V. of Scotland, like his father and grandfather, he was on occasion a poet himself. Here is a song of his composition, which, as Cunningham observes, is certainly characteristic of his way of life :

I pass all my hours in a shady old grove,
But I live not the day when I see not my love ;
I survey every walk now my Phillis is gone,
And sigh when I think we were there all alone ;
O then, 'tis O then, that I think there's no hell
Like loving, like loving too well.

But each shade and each conscious bow'r when I find,
Where I once have been happy, and she has been kind ;
When I see the print left of her shape on the green,
And imagine the pleasure may yet come again ;
O then 'tis I think that no joys are above
The pleasures of love.

While alone to myself I repeat all her charms,
She I love may be locked in another man's arms,
She may laugh at my cares, and so false she may be,
To say all the kind things she before said to me ;
O then, 'tis O then, that I think there's no hell
Like loving too well.

But when I consider the truth of her heart ;
Such an innocent passion, so kind without art ;
I fear I have wronged her, and hope she may be
So full of true love to be jealous of me ;
And then 'tis I think that no joys are above
The pleasures of love.

In matters connected with the stage he showed even more discernment than in poetry, and the drama owed much to his encouragement. It was he who, as we have seen, suggested to Dryden the idea of his comedy of *Secret Love, or The Maiden Queen*, in which Nell Gwyn scored her first great success, nor was this the only play which owed its inspiration to the same source. For, not long before his death, he drew the attention of the poet Crowne to the Spanish play, *No puede ser*; or *It cannot be*, and suggested that he should write one on somewhat similar lines. The result was that excellent comedy *Sir Courtly Nice*.

He was a buyer of pictures, and was greatly interested in architecture, in the history of which, even more than in that of portrait-painting, his reign forms a memorable epoch. He enjoyed working with his hands and mastering the techniques of manual trades. Of shipbuilding he possessed a really wonderful knowledge, and the yacht which he had built for him in 1663 was fitted with navigation contrivances of his own. The bent of his intellect, however, lay rather in the direction of physical science. He knew, Evelyn tells us, of many empirical medicines, and he spent many long days in his laboratory with Robert Moray, who had been President of the Royal Society and was regarded as the ablest Scotsman of his day.* His fondness for chemistry, which he shared with his cousin, Prince Rupert, he never lost, and in the very

* "The King of England, who is so inconstant in most things," wrote the French Ambassador, Colbert de Croissy, "shows in one respect fixity of application. Come what may, he spends part of his time in a laboratory, making chemical experiments."

month of his death he was engaged in the production of mercury.

There was no pretence or vanity in him, and in this may be found the key to his popularity, the explanation of why, worthless prince as he was in many ways, he lived beloved and died lamented by a very large portion of his people. "Is this like me?" said he to the painter Riley, who had just completed a decidedly unflattering portrait of his royal patron. "Then, odd's fish! [his favourite phrase], I *am* an ugly fellow!" He had lived, when in exile, upon a footing of easy familiarity with his banished nobles, sharing the pleasures with which they had striven to soften the discomforts and humiliations of adversity, and had in this way grown accustomed to dispense with ceremony, and to regard it as useless and ridiculous; and, now that he had come into his own again, he refused to surround himself with the state which most of his predecessors had deemed indispensable to their dignity. It seems, indeed, to have been difficult for him to act, even for a moment, the part of a king, either in words or gesture. When he visited the House of Lords, he would descend from the throne and stand by the fire, drawing a crowd about him that broke up all the regularity and order of the place; and he came to the council-table carrying with him one or more of those little dogs with which his name is associated.

His very dog at council-board
Sits grave and wise as any lord,

wrote Rochester.

The people liked to see their Sovereign strolling

in the early morning in St. James's Park, feeding his ducks and peacocks; or playing tennis in the Mall; or striding along on one of his long walks "with his wonted large pace,"* accompanied by only one or two attendants, or encouraging English dramatists and English actors and actresses by his presence at the theatres. They felt that here was a king who really mixed with his subjects, and they forgot the shame of his dissolute Court and the fact that he had dragged the honour of England in the dust.

No prince was ever more sublimely indifferent to what was said or thought about him. Libels disturbed him not at all, and when Sheffield, in a satire unsurpassed for boldness even in an age of lampoons, compared him to Nero who fiddled while Rome was burning, he appears to have been rather amused than otherwise. From divines and others whose claims to administer it he admitted he was genially ready to accept censure. "I am going to hear little Ken tell me of my faults," he would observe with gay resignation before going to hear that preacher, and he was probably sincere enough in his belief that "God would not damn a man for a little irregular pleasure."

When compelled to listen to remonstrances upon his mode of life, he stipulated, however, that they should be administered in good taste. "Tell Dr. Frampton," said he, when the divine in question had preached a very outspoken sermon before him on the sin of adultery, "that I am not angry to be told of my faults, but I would have it done in a gentlemanly manner." It would seem, however, from an amusing letter of

* Teonge's Diary.

Charles to his sister, that not a few of the discourses that were composed for his Majesty's benefit never reached the ears for which they were intended. "We have," he writes, "the same disease of sermons that you complain of there, but I hope you have the same convenience that the rest of the family has, of sleeping out most of the time, which is a great ease to those who are bound to listen to them." In later years, indeed, Charles appears to have been in the habit of composing himself for a nap when the preacher ascended the pulpit, an example which the courtiers were not slow to follow. On one occasion, when South happened to be occupying the pulpit, he perceived Charles wrapped in peaceful slumber, while near him sat the Earl of Lauderdale snoring loudly. Pausing in his sermon, the preacher turned towards the earl. "My lord, my lord," he exclaimed, "you snore so loud you will wake the King!"

That Charles should have been the despair of the Anglican divines is scarcely a matter for surprise, since he was firmly convinced of the truth of the Roman Catholic religion and died in that communion, though he never found it possible to profess his faith during his lifetime. Moreover, the animosities between the Established Church and the Nonconformists with which his reign began had made him think indifferently of both, and he looked upon the clergy, Clarendon tells us, as a body of men who had compounded a religion for their own advantage.

The serenity of his temper was seldom ruffled, and, even when this happened, the storm was of short duration. Affairs of State were seldom capable of

causing him more than a mere passing irritation, and it was for offences of a purely personal nature, such as the efforts to thwart his determination to make Lady Castlemaine a lady of the Queen's Bedchamber, that his anger was reserved. The most striking instance of a loss of self-control that is recorded of him occurred when Henry Savile, one of his gentlemen, voted for the Address against Lauderdale in 1678. "The King was mightily displeased against him, and to so high a degree, that when he was late that night going to bed, and Savile coming in after his ordinary way, the King, upon the first sight of him, fell into such a passion that his face and lips became as pale (almost) as death, his cheeks and arms trembled, and then he said to Savile: 'You villayne, how dare you have the impudence to come into my presence when you are guilty of such baseness as you have shown this day? I doe now from henceforth discharge you from my service, commanding you never to come any more into my presence, nor to any place where I shall happen to be.'" Savile bowed and withdrew, but a few days later reappeared and resumed his duties, his Majesty, in the interval, having apparently forgotten all about the offence of which he had been guilty.

He was a remarkably shrewd judge of men, and if some of his Ministers were quite unworthy of the high position they occupied, he chose them because they happened to serve his purpose of the moment, not because he was in the least deceived as to their qualifications. "If writers be just to the memory of King Charles II.," writes Dryden, a few years after Charles's death, in dedicating his "King Arthur"



CHARLES THE SECOND

From a photograph by Emery Walker, after the picture by Mary Beale in the National Portrait Gallery.

to Halifax, "they cannot deny him to have been an exact knower of mankind, and a perfect distinguisher of their talents. It is true that his necessities often forced him to vary his counsellors and counsels, and sometimes to employ such persons in the management of his affairs who were rather fit for his present purpose than satisfactory to his judgment; but when it was choice in him, not compulsion, he was master of too much good sense to delight in heavy conversation; and, whatever his favourites of State might be, yet those of his affection were men of wit."

In his exile, Charles had acquired a personal knowledge of many of the Sovereigns and statesmen of Europe, or he had gathered much valuable information concerning them from those who knew them intimately; and Lord Keeper Guildford declares that he understood foreign affairs better than any of his Ministers. Unhappily, the only use he made of this knowledge was to fill his own pockets at the expense of his country's honour.

He was a great talker and an admirable *raconteur*, and nothing pleased him better than to discourse upon the incidents of his eventful life, and more particularly of his adventures after the battle of Worcester. Some of his courtiers found fault with this habit, and would seek pretexts to withdraw when his Majesty started upon his favourite topic; but others would listen with pleasure, and even affect an ignorance of what they had heard him relate ten times before, "treating a story of his telling as a good comedy that bears being often seen, if well acted." This love of talking made him fond of strangers,

whom his pleasant, unaffected manner placed at once at their ease, and who went away enraptured by his condescension.

His wit, the chief source of which was a quite extraordinary quickness of apprehension, is, of course, proverbial, though many of his witticisms were seasoned with so gross a salt that they will hardly bear reproduction. Happily, however, the majority of those that have come down to us are quite free from this objection, and, notwithstanding that some of them are doubtless well known, a selection may not be unwelcome.

One of the wittiest of his remarks was his reply to the epitaph which Rochester had written upon him at his own request :

" Here lies our sovereign lord the King,
Whose word no man relies on ;
Who never said a foolish thing,
And never did a wise one."

To which Charles retorted : " The matter is easily accounted for ; my discourse is my own ; while my actions are my Ministers' . "

No one could convey a rebuke in a more graceful manner. When Penn, the Quaker, stood before him with his hat on, the King immediately removed his. " Friend Charles," said Penn, " why dost thou not keep on thy hat ? " " 'Tis the custom of this place," replied the monarch, " that only one person should be covered at a time."

Once, when leaving a Guildhall dinner, the Lord Mayor, Sir Robert Viner, whose sense of the deference he owed his illustrious guest had been temporarily

obsured by the amount of wine he had consumed, pursued him, and, "catching him fast by the hand, cried out with a vehement oath and accent: 'Sire, you shall stay and take t'other bottle.'" The monarch, instead of resenting such familiarity, contented himself by smilingly repeating a line of the old song:

He that's drunk is as great as a king,

and immediately turned back and complied with his host's request.

Two of his best sallies were uttered at the expense of his brother, James, Duke of York. In allusion to the plain looks of that prince's mistresses, he observed that "he believed that he had his favourites given him by the priests by way of penance."

One morning—it was soon after the Rye House Plot—the King, accompanied only by two noblemen, was walking up Constitution Hill in the direction of Hyde Park, when he encountered the Duke of York, who had been hunting on Hounslow Heath, returning in his coach, escorted by a squadron of Life Guards. At sight of the King, the coach stopped, and the Duke, alighting, saluted his Majesty, at the same time expressing his surprise at finding him in such a place with so small an attendance, which, he feared, must expose him to some danger. "No kind of danger, brother," was the laughing reply; "for I am sure no man in England will take away my life to make *you* King."

Of Harrow Church, standing on a hill and visible for many miles round, he is reported to have said that "it was the only *visible* Church that he knew;" and when taken to see a man clamber up the outside of a

church to its very pinnacle, and there stand on his head, he offered him, on coming down, a patent to prevent any one doing it but himself.

He could jest at his own expense as well as at that of others. On one occasion, he inquired of Stillingfleet how it was that he invariably read his sermons before him, when he was informed that he always preached "without book" elsewhere. Stillingfleet answered something about the awe of so noble a congregation and the presence of so great and wise a prince; and then asked the King's permission to ask *him* a question. This being granted, he said: "Why does your Majesty read your speeches, when you can have none of the same reasons?" "Why, truly, doctor," replied the King, "your question is a very pertinent one and so will be my answer. I have asked the two Houses so often and for so much money, that I am ashamed to look them in the face."

An amusing story is related which shows that the monarch who scrupled not to become the pensioner of a foreign Power had a sense of honour as well as a sense of humour. On one of the King's birthdays a particularly impudent member of the light-fingered fraternity had contrived to slip into the palace, and was detected by Charles in the act of extracting a gold snuff-box from the pocket of a certain unsuspecting nobleman. The thief, not one whit abashed at being perceived by his Sovereign, put his finger to his nose, and favoured the King with a knowing wink. Charles took the hint, and watched with keen enjoyment while the noble owner of the snuff-box began searching first in one pocket and then in another in quest of

his missing property. At length, beckoning him to approach, he said : " You need not give yourself any more trouble about it, my lord ; your box is gone ; I am myself an accomplice. But I could not help it : I was made a confidant."

Charles's magnificent constitution and his active habits enabled him to defy the effects of a debauchery which would have brought most men to an early grave, or to premature decrepitude, until he was almost on the threshold of old age. Until within a few days before his death he rose at six o'clock in the morning—in the height of summer at an even earlier hour—and, no matter how dissipated his nights may have been, he always seemed as fresh as a lark. He was particularly fond of tennis, a game at which he greatly excelled ; and it was seldom that he passed a day without " taking his usual physicke at tennis,"* as he called it, visiting the court as early as it was light enough to see clearly. The tennis-court was not infrequently the place chosen by him for granting audiences on the most important matters, and we read that when in 1678 the lords of the Hamilton party came to press their cause against Lauderdale, they kissed the King's hands in the lobby of the court. His first serious illness, which occurred in the following year, was due to his imprudence in sauntering along the waterside in St. James's Park after taking part in an unusually hard game.

He was devoted to all kinds of field-sports, especially hunting ; and a chief attraction of England for him was the fact that there was no country in which they could be indulged in so freely. When not hunting,

* Clarendon.

he generally walked three or four hours a day by his watch, "which he commonly did so fast, that, as it was really an exercise to himself, so it was a trouble to all about him to keep up with him."*

Whether on foot or on horseback he was equally indefatigable. He would ride many miles to dine with some favourite member of his Court, returning the same evening. On one occasion, he covered sixty miles, rising at dawn and returning at midnight. On another, he did not go to bed until nearly midnight, and yet was in the saddle at three o'clock the following morning, and rode to Audley End, in Suffolk, where he was staying for the Newmarket races.

Not only was he a most accomplished horseman, but he was an excellent judge of horses, and possessed a knowledge of the animal which would have done credit to a veterinary surgeon. For this he was largely indebted to his old Governor, William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle, himself a noted horseman and breeder, who relates with pride that "he had the honour to be the first to sate the King on horseback," and declares that "his Majesty made my horses go better than any Italian or French riders (who had often rid them) would do." It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that at the Restoration, when, in the words of a drinking-song of the time :

"A hound and hawk no longer
Shall be tokens of disaffection.
A cock-fight shall cease
To be a breach of the peace,
And a horse-race an insurrection,"

* Burnet.

horse-racing and breeding should, as Newcastle had advised, have been sedulously patronized, and that the prosperity of Newmarket, which under Puritan rule had fallen on very evil days, should have undergone an amazing revival.

Racing, in a formal sense, with its Spring and Autumn meetings, began in 1665, though the King's first personal visit was not paid until the following year. From that time he appears to have rarely missed a meeting, sometimes being at Newmarket thrice in the year. On these visits he was usually accompanied by the Court, and the little town became for the time a very gay place indeed. Business was never allowed to intrude upon these holidays; all formality and ceremony were dispensed with, and Charles and his courtiers talked of nothing but racing, hunting, coursing, and cock-fighting. The Ambassadors followed the Court, but their requests for audiences were seldom acceded to; indeed, it is to be feared that there were times when his Majesty was hardly in a fit condition to receive them, so completely did he "put off the king." On Sundays the neighbouring University of Cambridge sent its most celebrated preachers to discourse before the King; but his Majesty appears to have found them somewhat long-winded, since, in 1673, he commanded them to deliver their sermons in the future from memory; which, in some cases, must have served seriously to curtail their eloquence.

Evelyn, who visited Newmarket on two occasions in 1670, has some interesting references to the place in his diary :

"22 July [1670]. We went to see the stables and fine horses, of which many were kept at vast expense, with all the art and tenderness imaginable. . . . We returned over Newmarket Heath, the way being mostly sweet turf and down, like Salisbury Plain, the jockeys breathing their fine barbs and racers and giving them their heats.

"9 and 10 October [1670]. Next day, after dinner, I was on the heath, where I saw the great race run between Woodcock and Flatfoot, belonging to the King and Mr. Elliot of the Bedchamber, many thousands being spectators; a more signal race had not been run for years."

Mr. J. P. Hore, in his "History of Newmarket," cites a letter from Sir Nicholas Armorer, who had put two guineas on Thumps, a horse belonging to Lord Thomond, for the "Great Race" of 1668, on behalf of the owner, which gives us a glimpse of life at Newmarket while the King was there:

"Thy Armorer brings for you and himself two guineas, which were improved on Thumps' victory; won but a yard and soe straight the entire six miles. The King is highly pleased with all his Newmarket recreations; by candle-light yesterday morning and this morning, hunting the hair; this afternoon he hawks and courses with greyhounds; to Norwich to-morrow; on Monday here again. The Cup ridd for next week before the Queene. As thou prizes earthly Paradise, bringe a mayde of honour behind thee next week."

The betting was often very heavy at Newmarket

even in those far-off days; matches for a thousand guineas a side were not uncommon; and we hear of a gentleman named Frampton, who, though his estate was not supposed to be worth more than £120 a year, wagered the sum of £900 on the result of a single race. Charles himself does not appear to have betted to any great extent, nor did he run horses of his own until the autumn meeting of 1671; but he then, or at any rate in the following year, put his horsemanship to practical use by becoming a gentleman-jockey. It is probable that the King rode his horse Woodcock against Tom Elliot's Flatfoot in the match spoken of by Evelyn, for though the diarist does not mention the fact, the old Newmarket Calendar states that this race was run "with owners up." But it is certain that he was riding at the autumn meeting of 1672, since we read in the Journal of Thomas Isham, of Pytchley, Northampton, under date October 30 of that year:

"Mr. Bullivant, Parson of Mantwell, came and said the King had ridden two heats at Newmarket (*Ac dicit Regem apud novum Mercatum bis stadium currisse*), and the Duke of Albemarle's horse had fallen and broken his neck."*

On March 24, 1675, a despatch from Sir Robert Carr to his colleagues at Whitehall exhibits the Merry Monarch riding his own horses and carrying all before him:

"Yesterday his Majestie Rode him three heats and a course and won the Plate, all fower were hard and

* "Journal of Thomas Isham, translated by the Rev. R. Isham, Rector of Lamport," cited by Mr. Hore.

nere run, and I doe assure you the King won by guid Horseman ship. Last night a match was maid between Blew Capp [the King's horse] and a consealed horse of Mr. Mayes' called Thumper, to run the six mile course twelve stone wait upon Tuesday in Easter week for 1000 guineas."*

* Mr. J. P. Hore, "History of Newmarket." The author mentions that the expenses of the King's journey from Whitehall to Newmarket and back amounted to the sum of £860 9s. 10½d.

CHAPTER VI

NELL LEAVES THE STAGE

NELL GWYN'S appearance as Almahide, in *The Conquest of Granada*, marks the termination of her career as an actress.* For the King had decided to take the mother of his child away from the stage and to acknowledge the relations which existed between them. Towards the end of the year 1670, Nell had removed from Lincoln's Inn Fields to a house on the north side of Pall Mall, which Pennant describes as "the first good house on the left of the square as one entered from Pall Mall." It was pulled down in 1848, when the Army and Navy Club was built. She

* Genist supposed that Nell returned to the stage in 1677, in which year he gives her credit for having acted Angelica Bianca, in Mrs. Behn's *Rover*, Astræa, in *The Constant Nymph*, and Thalestria, in Pordage's *Siege of Babylon*. In the following year he gives her Lady Squeamish, in Otway's *Friendship in Fashion*, and Lady Knowall, in Mrs. Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy*; while in 1682 he attributes to her the parts of Sunamire, in Southern's *Loyal Brother*, and Queen Elizabeth in Banks's *Unhappy Favourite*. "This," observes Mr. Wheatley, "must surely be a mistake, caused by some confusion with the other actress who bore the name of Gwyn. It is impossible to imagine the volatile Nell Gwyn creating the character of Queen Elizabeth. If there were no other reason for doubting this supposition of a return to the stage, it would be found in the fact that in 1675 Nell was appointed a Lady of the Privy Chamber to the Queen."

did not, however, occupy this house for more than a few months, since the following year found her on the opposite side of the street. This house, or rather the site of it, is now the office of the Eagle Insurance Company. Her neighbour, on one side, was Edward Griffin, Treasurer of the Chamber, and ancestor of the present Lord Braybrooke; and, on the other, the widow of Charles Weston, third Earl of Portland. Nell at first had only a lease of this house, but, as soon as she discovered this, she returned the lease to the King with an unprintable epigram, which so amused his Majesty that he forthwith bestowed the freehold upon her. The truth of this story seems to be confirmed by the fact that the house which occupies the site of the one in which Nelly lived is the only freehold on the south or Park side of Pall Mall.

The gardens of those houses on the south side of Pall Mall ran down to the garden of St. James's Palace, and we must bear in mind that in the well-known scene described by Evelyn, and which is the subject of a picture by the painter Ward, the King was walking in his own garden, and not, as is usually supposed, in the public park.

"2 March, 1671.—I walked with the King through St. James's Park to the *garden*, where I both saw and heard a very familiar discourse between the King and Mrs. Nelly, as they call an impudent comedian, she looking out of her garden on a terrace at the top of the wall, and the King standing on the green walk under it. I was heartily sorry at the scene."

Nell Gwyn's name is associated with quite a number of other houses, but, it would appear, without, as a



NELL GWYN

From a mezzotint engraving by P. V. B., after a picture by Sir Peter Lely.

rule, much foundation. Among these may be mentioned No. 53, Wardour Street, which before the name Princes Street was abolished and the whole length from Oxford Street to Coventry Street was called Wardour Street, was known as No. 38, Princes Street. From a deed dated April, 1677, it would seem that Nell was at one time owner or part-owner of this house, but there is no evidence that she ever lived there.

Tradition also affirms that she resided at one time at Bagnigge House, adjoining Bagnigge Wells, so popular a resort in the eighteenth century, and the Assembly Rooms of which once contained a bust which is supposed to have been that of Nell, but it is not corroborated by any evidence. The same may be said of her supposed association with Sandford House at Sandy End, Chelsea; Lauderdale House, Highgate, now included in Waterloo Park; a house at Mill Hill, near Littleberries; a house at Leyton, opposite the vicarage; and an old mansion, now pulled down, at Sunninghill, in Berkshire, where there is an avenue of limes called Nell Gwyn's Avenue.

There is, however, one residence respecting her connexion with which there can be no doubt. This is Burford House, Windsor, the site of which is now occupied by the Queen's Mews. Burford House was originally granted by Charles II. to Nell for life, and after her death in trust for her elder son, Charles, Earl of Burford (afterwards Duke of St. Albans), and the heirs male of his body; but this, as the following memorandum shows, was subsequently altered to include heirs female:

"Charles II. to Charles, Earl of Dorset and Middlesex, Sir George Hewitt, Bart., and Sir Edward Villiers, Kt., and W. Chiffinch, Esq.—After reciting that by Deeds of 13th and 14th of Sept., 32 Car. II., Chiffinch conveyed to them (Dorset, Hewitt and Villiers) Burford House with the gardens, etc., at New Windsor, Berks., for life, remainder to the Earl of Burford, our natural son, in tail male, remainder to the King in fee; the King orders the declaration of new trusts to let in the heirs female of the Earl of Burford, with ultimate remainder to Ellen Gwyn in fee."*

Prince George of Denmark and the Princess Anne resided at Burford House in 1689 and 1690.

The "elevation" of Nell Gwyn, following so closely on that of another star of the theatrical firmament, aroused a good deal of unfavourable comment, for even people who were far from being straitlaced condemned the present state of morality at Court and the nature and number of the King's amours. In the House of Commons, the Country party, as the Opposition began to be called about this time, failing in their efforts to defeat the money-bills which were continually being presented to that assembly, endeavoured to throw the burden upon new sources of revenue, which they hoped would prove insufficient. With this object, in October, 1670, they proposed a tax upon the play-houses, which, as Bishop Burnet very truly observes, had become "nests of prostitution." This was opposed by the Court party, upon whose behalf Sir John Birkenhead advanced the argument that "the

* Historical MSS. Comm., 4th Report, Part I., cited by Mr. H. B. Wheatley, Introduction to Cunningham's "Nell Gwyn" (edit. 1903.)

players were the King's servants and a part of his pleasure." Sir John Coventry,* member for Weymouth, who followed, did not fail to take advantage of the opening thus afforded him, and inquired, with much gravity, "whether did the King's pleasure lie among the men or the women that acted?" This impertinent allusion to the Sovereign's amours was reported to his Majesty, and "it was said that this was the first time that the King was personally reflected on: if it was passed over, more of the same kind would follow, and it would grow a fashion to talk so." Charles was therefore urged "to take such severe notice of the offence that for the future no one would dare to talk so."

"The Duke of York told me," writes Burnet, "that he did all he could to divert him from the resolution he took; which was to send some of his guards and watch in the street where Sir John had his lodging † and leave a mark upon him. Sands and O'Brian ‡ and some others went; and, as Coventry was going home, they drew about him: he stood up to the wall, snatched the flambeau out of his servant's hand, and, with that in one hand and his sword in the other,

* He was the son of John Coventry, second son of Lord Keeper Thomas Coventry. In 1640 he was elected to the Long Parliament as member for Evesham, but in 1645 was disabled from sitting in the House of Commons, on account of his strong Royalist opinions. He served in the Royalist Army, and his attachment to the Crown was so well known that at the coronation of Charles II. he was created a Knight of the Bath. In January, 1667, he was elected M.P. for Weymouth, and, although his uncles, Henry and William Coventry, were both in office, at once went into opposition.

† Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, the same street in which Moll Davis was now living.

‡ He was a son of Lord Inchequin and a very "roystering blade" indeed.

he defended himself so well that he got more credit by it than by all the actions of his life. He wounded some of them, but was soon disarmed, and then they cut his nose to the bone, to teach him to remember what respect he owed to the King; and so they left him and went back to the Duke of Monmouth, where O'Brian's arm was dressed. That matter was executed by orders from the Duke of Monmouth, for which he was severely censured, because he lived then in professions of friendship with Coventry, so that his subjection to the King was not thought an excuse for directing so vile an attempt on his friend without sending him secret notice of what was designed. Coventry had his nose so well needled up that the scar was scarcely to be discerned.”*

This outrage upon the person of one of its members roused the Commons to fury, and they proceeded to pass sentence of banishment upon the perpetrators, in which they inserted a clause to the effect that it should not be in the King's power to pardon them.

* By a singular coincidence, the punishment inflicted on Sir John Coventry was what, some eighteen months before, Sir John's uncle, the celebrated Sir William Coventry, had threatened to inflict upon the actor of the King's House who should dare to caricature him upon the stage. Sir William's frankness and independence had procured for him many enemies, and in March, 1668, he was informed that the Duke of Buckingham and Robert Howard intended to have him caricatured in *The Rehearsal*, which was shortly to be produced at the King's House. Upon which he bade Killigrew “to tell his actors, whoever they were, that he would not complain to my Lord Chamberlain, which was too weak, nor get him beaten, as Sir Charles Sedley had done [Sedley had recently administered a severe thrashing to the actor Kynaston, who had mimicked him upon the stage], but that he would cause his nose to be cut.” Not satisfied with this, he challenged the Duke of Buckingham to a duel, and was committed to the Tower by the King, for sending a challenge to a person of the duke's distinction.

After which they framed an act, which was known as the Coventry Act, making it felony, without benefit of clergy, to maim or disfigure any one in the manner there mentioned.

But we must now turn for a moment to matters of foreign policy, which were to lead to the introduction into Charles's seraglio of a new sultana.

CHAPTER VII

THE TREATY OF DOVER

FOR some time past the greater part of the English nation had been alive to the fact that the real enemy to the peace of Europe was Louis XIV. In the summer of 1667, that monarch had invaded the Spanish Netherlands, and marched triumphantly through the country, taking city after city. It was plain that nothing could prevent the complete conquest of the Low Countries but a close alliance between England and Holland, and on January 23, 1668, the Dutch Minister, De Witt, and the English Ambassador at The Hague, Sir William Temple, concluded the Triple Alliance between England, Holland and Sweden, by which these countries bound themselves to check the advance of France. Louis, not daring to face such a coalition, stayed his advance in the Low Countries, but, despite the severity of the winter, poured his forces, under the Great Condé, into the Franche-Comté, and subdued that province in a fortnight. He then consented to negotiate, and on May 2 the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle was signed, by which, in return for the French evacuation of the Franche-Comté, Spain surrendered to Louis several important

frontier-towns, including Lille, Tournai and Courtrai. Thus, he retired with very considerable advantage; nevertheless, his mortification at being prevented from securing all that he coveted was very keen, and he never forgave the Dutch for their interference.

By this treaty, which was very popular in England, the country assumed for the moment its rightful position in Europe, and entered upon the policy which the situation of affairs upon the Continent rendered necessary for the next hundred years. But, on the part of Charles II., this sudden assumption of a national policy was merely a concession to popular feeling, for, even while his Ministers were treating with Holland, the King was himself engaged in secret negotiations with Louis XIV.

The motives which induced Charles to enter into those schemes so antagonistic to the national interests which have disgraced his reign were two. In the first place, he desired to be independent of Parliament and of his people. It must not be supposed that Charles had any desire to be an absolute monarch in the sense that Louis XIV. was. His idea of absolutism probably did not go much beyond freedom from all restraint and liberty to do as he pleased. But the increasing interference of the Commons in his expenditure and the impertinence, as he considered it, of their inquiries into the use of the money granted him had aroused his anger. He could not bear, he said, that a set of fellows should look into his expenditure, and he was determined to dispense with the necessity of summoning Parliament, if this could be contrived. His second motive was the desire to establish the Roman

Catholic religion, for, as we have seen, Charles was firmly convinced that Roman Catholicism was the best form of Christianity. So far back as 1662 he had sent Sir Richard Bellings to Rome to arrange the terms of England's conversion, and in 1668 he entered into correspondence with Oliva, the General of the Jesuits, through his natural son, James de la Cloche.* In the same year the conversion of the Duke of York became known to him, and on January 25, 1669, a secret conference between the two royal brothers, with Arlington, Clifford and Arundel of Wardour, took place in the duke's bedchamber, at which it was decided to communicate the intended conversion of the realm to Louis XIV. and to invite his co-operation.

For without external help it would, of course, be impossible for Charles to realize either of his objects, and the ally who would be most willing to support him was naturally Louis, who also had two great objects in view, for which he would be prepared to pay high: the destruction of Holland, where the Republican form of government was regarded by the French monarch as a standing insult to despotism, and the acquisition of some share, if not of the whole, of the Spanish dominions, which might at any moment fall vacant by the death of the weakling Charles of Spain, and to which Louis, notwithstanding his wife's renunciation, fully intended to lay claim.

In 1661, under Clarendon's rule, the evil precedent had been admitted of receiving money from France, and in 1662 Dunkerque had been sold to Louis XIV. In February, 1667, during the Dutch war, a secret

* See page 5 *supra*.

alliance had been made between the two sovereigns, Charles promising Louis a free hand in the Netherlands, and Louis undertaking to support Charles's designs "in or out of the kingdom." It was the refusal of France to accede to all his demands, which Louis considered far too exorbitant, which had induced Charles to close with the Dutch proposals and sanction the Triple Alliance; but, so far as he himself was concerned, the league with the States-General was merely a temporary expedient, and he was, besides, well aware that the mercantile jealousy of his subjects against the Dutch still continued, and would soon cause the enthusiasm with which it had been received to evaporate. Louis, on his side, was careful to keep the door open for fresh negotiations, and, by way of calming English susceptibilities, Colbert de Croissy was sent to England (July, 1668) to conclude a commercial treaty advantageous to this country.

But, though things seemed to promise well for the success of his schemes, the French King had gauged the character of Charles too accurately to have over-much faith in his promises, and he was most anxious to find an agent who might be able to gain sufficient influence over his unstable mind to keep him faithful to the interests of France. For a moment he had thought of Lady Castlemaine, but Colbert de Croissy had assured him that no reliance was to be placed in that lady, so completely was she dominated by the passion of the moment; and he was obliged to look elsewhere.

After a long search, he thought he had found the man he required. There happened to be in Paris

at this time an Italian monk named Pregnani, who had dazzled the imagination of the Electress of Bavaria by his knowledge of alchemy and astrology. After taking him from his convent, she recommended him to the King of France, and begged him to give him an abbey. "He understands," wrote the princess, "how to blow a bellows and use crucibles, according to the rules of alchemy, has infinite cleverness and marvellous suppleness and dexterity in attaining his ends."

Now, in one of his Ambassador's gossiping despatches, Louis had noted the passage which we have already cited elsewhere:* "The King of England, who is so inconstant in most things, shows in one respect fixity of application. Come what may, he spends daily a part of his time in a laboratory making chemical experiments." Since to attempt to govern Charles through Lady Castlemaine appeared to be hopeless, Louis decided to try and govern him through his laboratory, and to send Pregnani, who had been duly provided with an abbey, to England.

But to introduce Pregnani into the Court circle without exciting suspicion was a matter which presented some little difficulty, and Colbert de Croissy, whom Louis consulted, was at first somewhat puzzled how to proceed. Eventually, however, he decided to make use of the Duke of Monmouth, who was credulous and superstitious and to whom his royal sire was greatly attached. At a supper-party at the French Embassy at which Monmouth was present, Colbert de Croissy adroitly turned the conversation

* See page 72 note *supra*.

to the subject of the occult sciences, and told such tall tales of the wonderful transmutations which Pregnani could effect and the horoscopes he cast that the curiosity of the duke, who appears to have been very anxious to learn whether the heavenly bodies favoured his pretensions to the Crown of England, was excited. Monmouth invited Pregnani to London, where he went at night to receive the Ambassador's instructions, for Louis XIV., more than half ashamed of being represented by a charlatan, wished the mission to remain a secret. From London the abbé followed the Court to Newmarket for the Spring Meeting of 1669; and there Monmouth, in order to put his powers to the test, informed him that he was in love with a certain young lady, to whom his father, the King, and his uncle, the Duke of York, were likewise making advances, and demanded to know which of the three was destined to be the damsel's choice. The soothsayer, without having seen the girl in question, though it is probable that he had found some means to obtain information concerning her, proceeded to describe her appearance, her disposition, and her inclinations, what her past was and what her future would be. In short, he was so circumstantial that his distinguished patron, much impressed, informed the King of the matter, and the abbé received a command to fetch his astrological books to Newmarket and cast his Majesty's horoscope. "Such, Monsieur, is the beginning of the business," writes Colbert de Croissy to Lionne. "If it ends well, I shall have great things to tell you before long."*

* Despatch of April 1, 1669, cited by Forneron, *Louise de Kéroualle*.

He had indeed, though the affair had ended far from well, and the queer things he had to relate were not such as the Minister or his master cared to hear. For it would appear that the reverend astrologer, very possibly after dining or supping more wisely than well, had been so weak as to allow himself to be persuaded into attempting to forecast the results of some of the races at Newmarket, with the most unfortunate results for those who had been misguided enough to place faith in his predictions, and for his mission.*

"He (Pregnani)," writes the Ambassador, "has not appeared satisfied with the King's mind, which, he says, inclines rather to trifles than to matters of importance. He hopes, nevertheless, Monsieur, that he will bring him to take a good resolution, from the apprehension that he will forecast in his horoscope impending disaster. However, the King told me, on his arrival [from Newmarket], that the abbé had

* It is quite probable that Charles, much less credulous than the French fondly imagined, had seen through the design from the first. Any way, we find him writing to Louis XIV. as follows :

"I find the poor Abbé Pregnani very much troubled, for fear that the railleries about foretelling the horse-matches have done him some prejudice with you, which I hope it has not done, for he was only trying new tricks, which he had read of in bookes, and gave them little credit, as we did. . . . The man has witt enough, and is as much your servant as is possible, which makes me love him."

The poor abbé, it may be mentioned, had suffered many things in his efforts to ingratiate himself with the indefatigable monarch. On one occasion, Charles pulled him out of bed at three o'clock on a cold March morning and made him ride with him to Audley End. On another, he invited him to accompany him from Audley End to Newmarket, to see a foot-race, the whole way being accomplished at a sharp trot, which shook the poor soothsayer so much that he arrived quite exhausted.

been very much deceived in the predictions that he had made about the results of each race at Newmarket, which were wrong in every single instance; and that the Duke of Monmouth's servants had, on that account, heavy losses to lay to his charge, since they had wagered all that they possessed on the assurances of certain gain that he had given them. He [the King] has since indulged in other pleasantries, which leave no room for hope that he has much respect for his prognostications. Still, as the King has much curiosity, perhaps he will be very willing to learn in private what he affects to laugh at publicly."*

Lionne was of the contrary opinion, judging very rightly that a sporting monarch was little likely to allow himself to be influenced by an agent who had proved himself an unreliable tipster; and this unfortunate attempt to apply sorcery to horse-racing caused the disgrace of the presumptuous abbé. "As for the Abbé Pregnani," writes the Minister disdainfully, "since he has not acquired the credit that it was supposed he would obtain with the King by his astrology or his curiosities of chemistry, there is little appearance that he will be able to make more progress in the future."†

And the abbé was promptly recalled to France, with strict injunctions to dissimulate with all possible care the hopes, so little flattering to Charles II., that had been based on his mission.

* Despatch of May 4, 1669, cited by Forneron.

† From a letter of Charles II. to his sister, we learn that Pregnani was the dupe of his own predictions, as he backed them himself, and that "James [the Duke of Monmouth] believed him so much that he lost his money upon the same score."

The Pregnani fiasco was the more mortifying to Louis XIV. and his Ministers, inasmuch as Charles, who a few weeks before had seemed eager to come to terms with France, had now begun to hang back and to raise the price of his alliance, the reason being that whereas in the previous autumn the faithful Commons, being in a surly mood, had voted what his Majesty considered a totally inadequate supply, they had lately shown themselves more generously disposed. In these circumstances, Louis comprehended the necessity of yielding to his demands. The few remaining difficulties were left to be overcome by the Duchesse d'Orléans—through whose hands also the confidential letters had passed—who now paid her royal brother a long-promised visit.

Madame embarked at Calais on the evening of May 24, accompanied by a suite of no less than 237 persons. They numbered among them several ladies and gentlemen of very high rank, but the only one of her attendants with whom we need concern ourselves here was a young girl named Louise Renée de Penancœt de Kéroualle, a member of a poor but noble Breton family, who had some little time before entered Henrietta's service as maid-of-honour, and who was destined to become the agent and symbol of French influence at the Court of Charles II. and the ancestress of an English ducal House.

Louise de Kéroualle was of a very ancient lineage on both sides. In 1330, François de Pentrœt, grandson of the Vice-Admiral of Brittany, married Jeanne de Penancœt, dame de Kéroualle. The Pentrœts de Penancœt were one of the four great families of the



LOUISE DE KÉROUALLE, DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH
From a painting by Pierre Mignard in the National Portrait Gallery.

bishopric of Léon, of whom it was said: The Pentrôets for antiquity, the Chastels for valour, the Kermans for riches, and the Kergournadecs for chivalry. The children of the marriage assumed the name of their mother and her coat-of-arms—" *fascé d'argent et d'azur de six pièces*"—and in 1645 one of their descendants, Guillaume de Penancôet, married Marie de Ploeur de Timeur, daughter of Marie de Rieux. Of this union three children were born: two girls and a boy. The elder of the girls was the future mistress of Charles II.*

"It does not count for much in our time," observes the lady's biographer, M. Henri Forneron, "to be a de Rieux, or to have a forefather so renowned for valour in the fourteenth century as the fair Louise was for gallantries in the seventeenth. But these old souvenirs of race and blazon explain the circumstances of her goal, and enable us to understand how she was able to become maid-of-honour to Henrietta, Duchesse d'Orléans, and effectually dispose of the ridiculous adventures with which the pamphlets have bespattered her early years."

The most widely known of these libellous fictions published against her is "The Secret History of the Duchess of Portsmouth" (London, 1690), of which a

* Louise's parents were well acquainted with Evelyn's father-in-law, Sir Richard Browne, who, shortly before the Restoration, when on a visit to Brest, had been entertained by them at their country-house, situated about a mile from that port. When M. de Kéroualle and his wife came to England in 1675, Sir Richard returned their hospitality, and invited Evelyn to meet them. The diarist describes the father of the then Duchess of Portsmouth as "a soldierly person and a good fellow, as the Bretons generally are"; while Madame de Kéroualle, he says, had been very handsome and "seemed a shrewd, understanding woman." Louise certainly inherited the maternal shrewdness.

French translation appeared the same year.* According to this, Mlle. de Kéroualle fled from the house of an aunt living in Paris, to whose care her parents had entrusted her, and, disguised as a page accompanied the Duc de Beaufort, with whom she had fallen desperately in love, on the expedition to Candia. After the duke's death, she served as page to other officers before returning to France. Well, the Candia expedition lasted from the first week in June to the second week in October, 1669, and during the whole of that time Louise de Kéroualle was at the French Court, acting as maid-of-honour to *Madame*. The calumny must have originated in the part taken in this unfortunate expedition by Louise's brother, Sebastian de Kéroualle, who died soon after landing in Provence, on his return from Candia.

Nevertheless, if we are to believe the memoirs and correspondence of the time, the damsel's conduct while at the Court of France would not appear to have been altogether free from reproach. In the same year in which the "Secret History" credits her with the escapade mentioned above, she became acquainted with the Comte de Sault, son of the Duc de Lesdiguières, who in 1662 had been the chief victor in the

* It was followed by a second English edition, entitled "The Life, Amours, and Secret History of Francelia, Duchess of P—h" (London, 1734), and M. Forneron states that a second French edition likewise appeared. It is a romance in the New Atalantis style, containing, however, more fact than fiction. All the earlier part is sheer invention; the remainder is diversified by such charges as complicity in the death of Sir Edward Berry Godfrey, and of Charles II. himself. The proper names are thinly disguised. The *Mémoires secrets de la duchesse de P . . .*, publiés avec des historiques (2 vols. Paris, 1805) and ascribed to J. Lacombe are a mere elaboration of the above, with some original additions.

famous jousts held under the windows of the Tuileries, which gave their name to the Place du Carrousel. The Count, who was notorious for his gallantries, paid her such marked attention that he passed as her lover, and we shall see how, in after years, when Mlle. de Kéroualle had blossomed into the Duchess of Portsmouth, a haughty English dame, the Marchioness of Worcester, insultingly reminded her of this early attachment.

Any way, it is beyond question that the reputation of "*la belle Bretonne*," as she had come to be called, was compromised; Madame de Sévigné and Louvois speak of her in far from complimentary terms, while Saint-Simon says: "Her parents intended her to be the King's mistress, and she obtained the place of maid-of-honour to Henrietta of England. Unfortunately for her, Mlle. de la Vallière was also maid-of-honour to the princess, and the King gave her the preference. If the latter had little intelligence, she was gentle, good-natured, and obliging, and made herself liked at the Court. One might therefore say, without attaching any importance to the libellous pamphlets, that, whether owing to indiscretions or ambitious words, Mlle. de Kéroualle had succeeded in creating the impression that she would not have objected to the rôle of King's favourite."

Madame met with a most affectionate reception from her relatives in England. At five o'clock on the morning of May 25, when the cliffs of Dover were coming into sight, a boat was observed rowing at full speed towards the fleet. The princess hurried on deck, and saw that it contained both the King and

the Duke of York, who, accompanied by Prince Rupert and the Duke of Monmouth, had come to welcome her. After a joyful meeting, they all landed at Dover, and *Madame* was conducted to the castle, which had been prepared for her reception. "*Madame* is here in perfect health," wrote Colbert de Croissy, who had come to Dover to meet her. "The King of England has sent for the Queen and the Duchess of York and is doing everything possible to enliven this dreary place and make it agreeable to *Madame*."

Henrietta's influence over her elder brother succeeded, as Louis XIV. had foreseen, in removing Charles's remaining objections, and on June 1 the Treaty of Dover was signed by Clifford, Arlington, and Arundel, on behalf of England, and by Colbert de Croissy, on the part of France. By this too-famous compact, which rendered England subservient to French interests at a time when, by the continuance of her alliance with Holland, the ambition of *le Grand Monarque* might easily have been checked, and thus must be considered mainly responsible for all the blood shed in Europe from that day until the Peace of Utrecht, Charles promised to declare himself a Catholic, as soon as it should be safe to do so, in return for which he was to receive £150,000 to assist him in any difficulties which might arise on that score, and engaged to aid France in a war against Holland, in consideration of which he was to have £225,000 a year, and the command of the coasts of Zealand, as his share of the spoil. He was also to assist Louis to make good his claim on the Spanish succession, and to receive, as his reward, Ostend and Minorca,

together with any conquests he might make in South America.

Louis thus secured his immediate object ; but, except for honour, Charles was no loser. He was, indeed, bound to declare his conversion, but the date was left absolutely to himself, while he was at once to receive the £150,000 stipulated for ; and after he had succeeded in plunging his kingdom into a war with Holland, and had thus gone so far with the treaty that money from France could not be refused him, he allowed the matter to lie dormant until the fear of death drove him to confess his real belief.

No sooner was the Treaty of Dover—" *le Traité de Madame*," as the French termed it—signed than the trouble likely to be met with in carrying it out began to fill Charles with misgivings. It was impossible to show the treaty as it stood to the King's Protestant servants—to Buckingham, Lauderdale, Ashley, Ormond, or Prince Rupert ; while it was equally impossible to conceal from them for any length of time the fact that a treaty had been made. In these circumstances, Charles had recourse to one of the most curious pieces of by-play in history. Taking advantage of the egotism of Buckingham, he allowed him to negotiate—in the firm belief that the suggestion was his own—a fresh treaty, "*le Traité simulé*," in which all mention of the King's conversion was omitted, the subsidy offered for that purpose being now added to that to be given for the war. The *Traité simulé* was duly signed by Buckingham, Lauderdale and Ashley, at the beginning of the following year.

The direct object of *Madame's* journey having been

thus accomplished, the remainder of her stay was spent in pleasant intercourse with the Royal Family. The anniversary of the Restoration was celebrated with great rejoicings. One day, Charles took his sister to Canterbury, where a ballet and a comedy were acted before her, followed by a sumptuous collation in the hall of St. Augustine's Abbey. On another, the royal party sailed in a yacht along the coast and paid a visit to the fleet. Wherever she went, *Madame* appears to have captured all hearts, and the impression made by her beauty and graciousness is reflected in the correspondence of many who were then present.

The charming princess, however, was not the only one of the visitors from the opposite side of the Channel who succeeded in capturing hearts. Before many days had passed, it was observed that whenever Mlle. de Kéroualle happened to be in attendance on her mistress, the King's eyes were continually travelling in her direction; and it was clear that "the childish, simple, baby face"* of the Breton maiden, her gentle, musical voice, and the languorous grace of her movements had made upon him the most profound impression—an impression which, it is generally believed, was the cause of the prolongation of the negotiations for the Treaty of Dover.

On June 12, *Madame* sailed for France, and Charles showed his grief at his sister's departure by loading her with presents for herself and her friends. He gave her 6,000 pistoles to defray the expenses of her journey, presented her with 2,000 gold crowns to build a chapel at Chaillot in memory of their mother, Queen

* Evelyn.

Henrietta Maria, and on the eve of her departure bestowed upon her a number of costly jewels. At the same time, he begged her to leave him one of her own jewels as a parting souvenir. Henrietta readily consented, and, turning to Louise de K roualle, who happened to be in attendance, bade her fetch her jewel-casket, that his Majesty might choose for himself. Louise was about to obey, when Charles, with a gallant bow, took the blushing maiden's hand and begged his sister to allow her to remain in England as maid-of-honour to the Queen, since she was the only jewel he coveted.

From what subsequently occurred, we can well believe that had the decision rested with the "jewel" concerned, she would not have raised any very strong objection to expatriating herself, then and there. But *Madame*, to her credit, firmly refused to grant the King's request and told him that she was responsible to Mlle. de K roualle's parents for her safe return to France.* And so the lovelorn monarch had per-

✓ * Mr. Allan Fea, in his charming book, "Some Beauties of the Seventeenth Century" (Methuen, 1906), accuses *Madame* of having laid a trap for her amorous brother, and maintains that her refusal to grant his request was merely a clever move on her part to entangle him more firmly in it: "The snare which had been laid caught its victim, but the clever agent of the *Grand Monarque* was well acquainted with her brother's fickle disposition. A too easy conquest would make no lasting impression upon his heart, and the interests of France would suffer. Absence makes the heart grow fonder . . ." (That depends entirely, as La Rochefoucauld tells us, on how fond the heart happens to be at the moment of the separation). In regard to this, we may observe that there is absolutely no proof of the existence at the time of *Madame's* visit to England of any design to establish Louise de K roualle as the mistress of Charles II. Further, we are inclined to doubt whether Henrietta, who, though often lamentably indiscreet, was always pure, would have allowed herself to have been made a party to such a design, much less to initiate it.

force to wave a sorrowful adieu to his new enchantress and return to Whitehall, to find what consolation he might in the society of his Castlemaines and Gwyns.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ACCESSION OF LOUISE DE KÉROUALLE

HAPPY in the successful result of her mission, *Madame* returned to France; but in the night of June 29-30, she died suddenly at Saint-Cloud, after some hours of terrible agony. Rumours of poisoning were instantly set afloat* and, to the

* The belief that *Madame* had been poisoned was widely prevalent at the time and has been held by many authorities on the period, such as Walckenau and François Revaissou, and by specialists, like Dr. Legué, who, in his interesting work, *Médecins and Empoisonneurs*, devoted a new study to the question and endeavoured to prove that she was poisoned by corrosive sublimate. Suspicion pointed to the Chevalier de Lorraine, the infamous favourite of the Duc d'Orléans, whom *Madame* had caused to be banished from the Court. He was supposed, not only to have instigated the crime, but to have supplied the poison, with which one of his accomplices impregnated a cup out of which the unfortunate princess was in the habit of drinking chicory water after dinner. Such was the opinion of *Monsieur's* second wife, Charlotte Elizabeth, Princess Palatine, and of Saint-Simon, though they acquit *Monsieur* himself of any knowledge of the plot. Both "the Palatine" and Saint-Simon were, however, confirmed scandalmongers; and modern scientific investigation leaves very little doubt that *Madame*, who had been for some time in a very delicate state of health, and suffered from a chronic inflammation of the stomach, a form of gastritis, died of peritonitis, resulting from a chill which she had contracted while bathing in the river two or three days previously. See on this question the admirable study of M. Funck-Brentano, written in collaboration with Professor Paul Brouardel and Dr. Paul le Gendre, in his *le Drame des poisons*.

consternation of Louis XIV. and his Ministers, the English Court appeared inclined to believe them. When Sir Thomas Armstrong, despatched in all haste by Robert Montagu, the English Ambassador at Paris, arrived with the fatal news, Charles II. gave way to a violent outburst of grief and indignation, and heaped curses upon the head of the Duc d'Orléans, whom he suspected of having instigated the crime. After a while, he recovered his composure, and prudently refrained from expressing his feelings in public. "*Monsieur* is a villain!" he exclaimed, "but, Sir Thomas, I beg of you not to say a word of this to others." Nevertheless, the horrible suspicion of poison, which *Madame* herself had shared, gained ground rapidly, and excited a storm of popular indignation.

"The King of England is inconsolable," wrote Colbert de Croissy to Lionne, "and what still further increases his affliction and his sorrow, is that there are many people who do not refrain from asserting that *Madame* was poisoned, and this malicious rumour is spreading so rapidly in the town that some of the rabble have declared that violent hands ought to be laid upon the French. Nevertheless, neither his Britannic Majesty nor any member of the Royal Family have said anything to show that they attach any credence to reports so extravagant and so far removed from the truth. I await impatiently your news respecting the details of this death, and the measures which will have been taken, in order to be able to restrain the principal persons of this Court from the inclination they have evinced to believe evil and to

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receive the sinister impressions that have been given them. God give me grace to overcome this outburst of anger, which, to tell you the truth, Monsieur, is not a little to be feared! . . . The Duke of Buckingham is in the transports of a madman, and if the King were not more wise and prudent, and milord Arlington very reasonable and well-intentioned, affairs here would be carried to the last extremities.”*

A day or two later, the Maréchal de Bellefonds, who had been chosen by Louis XIV. to offer his official condolences to the King of England, arrived at Whitehall. He brought with him a report drawn up by Vallot, one of the most eminent physicians of his time, who had been among the doctors present at the autopsy, confirming the opinion expressed by his colleagues that *Madame* had died of cholera morbus. Charles, however, received the marshal with a brusqueness very unusual in him, and it was plain that his suspicions were far from allayed. “When is the Chevalier de Lorraine going to be recalled to the Court?” he inquired sarcastically.

“I replied,” writes Bellefonds to Louis XIV., “that I did not know; that it was not easy to divine what your Majesty thought about such trifling matters, and that no one would presume to speak about it, unless your Majesty first broached the subject.”

The situation was alarming, and Louis XIV. began to ask himself in all seriousness whether the Treaty of Dover was worth the parchment on which it was

* Despatch of July 2, 1670, Mignet, *Négociations relatives à la succession d'Espagne sous Louis XIV.*

written, and whether it would not be advisable to renounce, for a time at least, his ambitious designs. Fortunately for him, matters soon began to assume a more hopeful aspect. Charles, whatever suspicions he might still have entertained about *Monsieur*, exonerated Louis from any responsibility in the affair, and was too anxious to finger the money which had been promised him to break his engagements to the French King; while Buckingham, whose "transports" had probably been occasioned more by the desire to court popular favour than by indignation at the supposed murder of the princess for whom he had so long advertised his passion, was won back by the persuasions of his old friend the Comte de Gramont, and by the promise of a pension from France for his mistress, the notorious Countess of Shrewsbury. Nevertheless, Louis felt that it was now more than ever necessary to have some one near the person of Charles who would be faithful to the interests of France, and use all his or her influence to ensure that monarch's subservience to his ambition.

Towards the middle of July, Buckingham, now entirely reconciled to France, was sent to Versailles to convey Charles's thanks to the King of France for his condolences on the death of *Madame*, and to negotiate the false treaty of which we have already spoken. Louis XIV., though inwardly consumed with merriment, as the duke, with all the gravity imaginable, went through the farce of discussing and drafting this futile agreement, received him with the greatest distinction, gave him a pension of 10,000 livres for Lady Shrewsbury, and promised that he should

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command the English auxiliary force in the coming war. (Although "*le Traité simulé*" provided for the employment of an English army, Charles never had the least intention of sending one.) "I have had more honour done me," wrote the delighted Buckingham to Arlington, "than ever was done to any subject. Nothing but our being mealy-mouthed can hinder us from finding our account in this matter. For you may almost ask what you please. The King of France is so much taken with the discourse I make to him of his greatness by land that he talks to me twenty times a day. All the courtiers wonder at it."

But Buckingham had still another duty to perform, and one of greater importance than negotiating farcical treaties. Before leaving England, Charles had commissioned him to renew to Mlle. de Kéroualle the offer which the King had made her at Dover. The duke carried out his instructions *con amore*, for he had been for some time past actively hostile to Lady Castlemaine, and was eager to see her deprived of her remaining influence. Indeed, having seen the impression that the fair Louise had made upon his susceptible master during the negotiations at Dover, he had fanned the flame, and had satirically remarked to Charles that he could show no more touching proof of his tenderness for his sister's memory than by charging himself with the care of one of her favourite attendants.

Louis and his Minister had, of course, been informed of the Dover episode, and had doubtless been pondering how they might facilitate Charles's wishes without arousing his suspicions that they were actuated by political motives; and great must have been their

satisfaction to learn of the instructions which he had given his Ambassador.

Mlle. de Kéroualle, when first approached on the matter, gave Buckingham to understand that, while deeply sensible of the goodness of his Britannic Majesty in wishing to provide for her future by offering her the same post about the person of his Queen as she had held with *Madame*, the shock of her beloved mistress's death had been so great that she had resolved to have done with the world and to take the veil. But Louis added his persuasions to those of the duke—to a loyal Frenchwoman her Sovereign's wishes were, of course, equivalent to a command—and eventually she consented. That Louise, who, as we shall presently see, was an exceedingly shrewd young woman, was, in reality, ready enough to accept the brilliant dishonour which awaited her at Whitehall—for, after what had happened at Dover, she could hardly pretend to mistake the meaning of her appointment as maid-of-honour to the luckless Queen Catherine—cannot be doubted; but she did not intend Buckingham or his master to think that such was the case.

Thus it came about that when Buckingham took leave of Louis XIV. and set out on his return to England, Mlle. de Kéroualle sat beside him in his luxurious travelling-carriage.

"The Duke of Buckingham," writes the Marquis de Saint-Maurice, the Ambassador of Savoy, to Duke Charles Emmanuel II., "has taken with him Mlle. de Kéroualle, who was attached to her late Highness; she is a beautiful girl, and it is thought that

the plan is to make her mistress to the King of Great Britain. He would like to dethrone Lady Castlemaine, who is his enemy, and his Most Christian Majesty would not be sorry to see the position filled by one of his subjects, for it is said the ladies have great influence over the mind of the King of England.”*

But Buckingham, as Burnet remarks, “was so full of mercury that he could not fix long in any friendship, or to any design,” and certainly his conduct on this occasion is a striking illustration of the truth of this observation. Although it was obviously to his interest to neglect no means of ingratiating himself with Mlle. de Kéroualle, he treated her with the most astonishing want of consideration. On arriving at Dieppe, he took ship for England, promising to send a royal yacht to convey his fair charge across the Channel. But once back in London, the diversions of the town appear to have driven all thought of the young lady out of his head, and the latter, to her profound chagrin, was obliged to remain at Dieppe for nearly a fortnight, before Ralph Montagu, the English Ambassador, learned of what had occurred, and wrote to Whitehall that “Mlle. de Kéroualle hath been at Dieppe these ten days, and hears nothing of the yacht that the Duke of Buckingham, Mr. Godolphin tells me, was to send for her.” The promised vessel was then despatched, and the girl escorted to London by some of Montagu’s own suite, where she was received by the courteous Lord Arlington, who, with his wife, did all in his power to atone for the slight which she had suffered. But the

* Despatch of September 19, 1670, cited by Mr. P. W. Sergeant, “My Lady Castlemaine” (Hutchinson, 1912).

proud Bretonne never forgave Buckingham his delinquency, and in years to come that volatile nobleman paid dearly for the dreary days which, thanks to him, the future Duchess of Portsmouth had been obliged to spend at Dieppe.

The reigning sultanas, Lady Castlemaine and Nell Gwyn, prepared to resist the French invader. The former, it should be mentioned, was now known by a more exalted title, having in August of that year persuaded Charles to confer upon her that of Duchess of Cleveland, together with a lavish pension; and, in the decline of her reign, simulated greater power than ever, by extracting from the King all kinds of favours and surrounding herself with all the pomp and magnificence imaginable. At a great ballet in February, 1670-71, she appeared "in a riche petticoat and half skirte, and a short man's coat very richly laced, a periwig, cravatt, and a hat: her hat and mask was very rich." She drove in the parks in a resplendent coach drawn by eight horses, and report said there were to be twelve. Her residence was Cleveland House, St. James's, upon the site of which now stands Bridgewater House, the name of which is preserved in that of Cleveland Row, where she lived in semi-royal state.

Louise de K  roualle, on her side, was carefully reconnoitring the ground. She knew that a too rapid surrender would be detrimental to her own interests, and to those of France, since Charles, like most men, valued a mistress in proportion to the difficulties he might encounter in overcoming her resistance, and she was resolved not to yield until she felt sure of her empire over him. And so, though now and again she appeared

to lend a willing enough ear to his Majesty's professions of devotion, yet when he pressed her too closely, she invariably contrived to slip away from him, leaving him, as that most ingenious of literary forgers, La Beaumelle, makes Madame de Maintenon say of Louis XIV., "*toujours affligé, mais jamais désespéré.*" Yes; that "childish, simple, baby face," of which Evelyn speaks, was a deceptive one—a mask for transcendent art and consummate finesse.

However, the affected coyness of Mlle. de Kéroualle appears to have been misunderstood at Versailles, and, as the months went by without bringing them any definite assurance that the young lady's resistance had terminated, they became seriously uneasy. Their joy was therefore great, when, towards the end of September, Colbert de Croissy reported that, while dining at the French Embassy the previous day, Mlle. de Kéroualle had been seized with a slight indisposition which inspired him with the hope that she had been less indifferent to the admiration of the King of England than he had been led to believe.

"The influence of Madame de Cleveland," he writes to Louvois, "diminishes daily, in such manner that the efforts which the Conde de Molina [the Spanish Ambassador] has been making to entice her away from us and to make of her a good Spaniard, by means of his presents, will be futile. It appears, on the contrary, that the affection of the King of England for Mlle. de Kéroualle increases every day, and the little attack of nausea which she had yesterday when dining with me makes me hope that her good fortune will continue, at least all the remainder of my embassy."

To which the Minister, all joyful, replies :

“The King was surprised at what you wrote me concerning Mlle. de Kéroualle, whose conduct while she was here, and since she has been in England, did not inspire much expectation that she would succeed in achieving such good fortune. His Majesty is anxious to be informed of the result of the connexion which you believe exists between the King and her.”

But the rejoicings were premature. The indisposition of which Colbert de Croissy had spoken did not proceed from the cause which he suspected. So far from being about to present his Majesty with an addition to his rapidly increasing family, Louise had not even crossed the Rubicon, but continued to blow hot and cold on the enamoured King.

The Ambassador was becoming alarmed, for it seemed to him that the girl did not appreciate as she ought the diplomatic interests which depended on her surrender ; and he was sufficiently well-acquainted with the character of Charles II. to know that, although Louise's resistance might, for a time, add zest to his pursuit and enhance her value in his eyes, yet he was not the man to allow himself to be long dominated by a prude—real or pretended—and that the day might not be far distant when he would seek consolation for her reserve in the attractions of some more facile beauty. In these circumstances, his Excellency decided that pressure must be brought to bear upon Louise to awaken her to a proper sense of the duty which she owed to her king and country, and he was so fortunate as to find valuable allies in Lord and Lady Arlington.

: “It is certain,” writes Colbert de Croissy to Louvois

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“that the King of England shows a warm affection for Mlle. de Kéroualle, and perhaps you may have heard from other sources that a richly-furnished lodging has been given her at Whitehall. His Majesty repairs to her apartment at nine o'clock every morning, and never stays there less than an hour, and sometimes two. He remains much longer after dinner, shares at her card-table in all her stakes and never allows her to want for anything. All the Ministers court eagerly the friendship of this lady, and milord Arlington said to me quite recently that he was very pleased to see that the King was becoming attached to her; and that, though his Majesty was not the man to communicate affairs of State to ladies, nevertheless, as it was in their power on occasion to render ill services to those whom they disliked and defeat their plans, it was much better for the King's good servants that his Majesty should have an inclination for this lady, who is not of a mischievous disposition, and is a gentlewoman, rather than for actresses and such-like unworthy creatures, of whom no man of quality could take the measure; that when he went to visit the young lady every one was able to see him enter and leave and to pay his court to him; and that it was necessary to counsel this young lady to cultivate the King's good graces, so that he might find with her nothing but pleasure, peace and quiet. He added that, if Lady Arlington took his advice, she would urge this young lady to yield unreservedly to the King's wishes, and tell her that there was no alternative for her but a convent in France, and that I ought to be the first to impress this upon her. I told him

jocularly that I was not so wanting in gratitude to the King or so foolish as to tell her to prefer religion to his good graces ; that I was also persuaded that she was not waiting for my advice, but that I would, none the less, give it her, to show how much both he and I appreciated her influence, and to inform her of the obligation which she was under to milord. I believe that I can assure you that if she has made sufficient progress in the King's affection to be of use in some way to his Majesty, she will do her duty."

The Countess of Arlington was of her husband's opinion, and concocted with Colbert de Croissy the final surrender of the fair maid-of-honour. This Ambassador of France was a former *président à mortier* of the Parlement of Paris, "a safe and sagacious mediocrity," says Saint-Simon, "who atoned by dint of diligence and common-sense for the ill-temper and coarse manners of his family." He did not consider the traditions of the judiciary in any way incompatible with pandering to the vicious caprices of the Sovereign to whom he was accredited when there was any political purpose to be served, and spared no pains to ingratiate himself with him. "The King," he writes to Louvois in January, 1671, "did me the honour to sup with me yesterday, when he showed, by indulging in a gay and unfettered debauch, that he does not distrust me."

The Countess of Arlington was equally untroubled by scruples, though she had not, in this matter, the Ambassador's excuse of patriotic motives. She was a Dutchwoman, Isabella von Beverwent by name, a

daughter of Louis of Nassau, and a sister of Lady Ossory. An ambitious, designing woman, she had betrothed her only daughter, Isabella, whom Evelyn describes as "a sweete child if ever I saw one," to the second son of the Duchess of Cleveland (Henry Fitzroy, afterwards Earl of Euston and Duke of Grafton), and desired to ensure herself against any loss of patronage which the approaching fall of the old favourite of the King might entail by facilitating the triumph of the new one and making her husband's country-seat, Euston Hall, near Thetford, the scene of it.

The plan of campaign decided upon between Lady Arlington and the French Ambassador was as follows. In the second week in October, Charles proposed to leave Whitehall for Newmarket. Colbert de Croissy was to come to Euston and bring Mlle. de Kéroualle with him, and his Majesty, who would naturally take frequent opportunities of coming over from Newmarket to see his enchantress, was to be invited to remain the night and afforded every facility for prosecuting his dishonourable suit and triumphing over the girl's last scruples. "I am going to his (Arlington's) country-seat of Euston," writes Colbert de Croissy to Louis XIV., "and, as the inclination of the King for Mlle. de Kéroualle, who makes this journey with me, is increasing daily, I doubt not that he will often come to visit us."*

The plot met with the complete approval of the Most Christian King. "The King was very pleased with what your letter contained regarding Mlle. de Kéroualle," writes Louvois to the Ambassador, "and

* Despatch of October 8, 1671, cited by Forneron.

will be interested to learn of the progress she makes in the good graces of the King of England." He even, it would appear, was pleased to jest upon the matter, and was of opinion that Charles "must have little love for his mistress, or must repose great confidence in you, to entrust her to your care on such a merry journey."

Besides the Ambassador and Mlle. de Kéroualle, the Arlingtons had invited the Countess of Sunderland and a great number of persons belonging to the Court, whom they entertained with the most prodigal magnificence. Evelyn, who was among the guests, has left us the following account of his visit to Euston :

"His (Lord Arlington's) house is a very noble pile, consisting of a fine pavilion after the French, besides a body of a large house, and those not built together, but formed of an addition to an old house (purchased by his lordship of one Sir T. Rookwood), yet with a vast expense made not only capable and roomsome, but very magnificent and commodious, as well within as without, nor less splendidly furnished. The staircase is very elegant, the garden handsome, the canal beautiful, but the soil dry, barren, and miserably sandy, which flies in drifts as the wind sits. . . . In my Lord's house, and especially above the staircase in the great hall, and some of the chambers and rooms of state, are paintings in fresco by Signor Verrio, being the first work that he did in England."

"During my stay," the diarist continues, "his Majesty came almost every second day with the Duke [of York], who commonly returned to Newmarket ;

but the King often lay here, during which time I had twice the honour to sit at table with him with all freedom. . . . On October 16, came all the great men from Newmarket and other parts both of Norfolk and Suffolk to make their court, the whole house filled from one end to the other with lords, ladies and gallants; there was such a furnished table as I had seldom seen, nor anything more splendid and free, so that for fifteen days there were entertained at least two hundred people and half as many horses, besides servants and guards, at infinite expense. In the morning, we went hunting and hawking; in the afternoon, till almost morning, to cards and dice, yet I must say without noise, swearing, quarrel or confusion of any sort. I, who was no gamester, had often discourse with the French Ambassador, Colbert, and went sometimes abroad on horseback with the ladies, to take the air, and now and then to hunting; thus idly passing the time, but not without more often recess to my pretty apartment, where I was quite out of all this hurry, and had leisure to converse with books, for there is no man more hospitably easy to be with than my Lord Arlington, of whose particular friendship and kindness I had ever a more than ordinary share.”*

The scheme of Lady Arlington and Colbert de Croissy succeeded perfectly. “The King,” writes the latter to Louvois, under date October 22, “comes frequently to take his repasts with us, and afterwards spends some hours with Mlle. de Kéroualle. He has already paid her three visits. He invited us yesterday

* *Diary*, October, 1671.

to the races at Newmarket, where we were entertained very splendidly, and he showed towards her all the kindness, all the little attentions and all the assiduities that a great passion can inspire. And, since she has not been wanting, on her side, in all the gratitude that the love of a great King can deserve from a beautiful girl, it is believed that the attachment will be of long duration and that it will exclude all the others."

But for the grand *dénouement* let us turn again to Evelyn :

"It was universally reported that the fair lady was bedded one of these nights, and the stocking flung after the manner of a married bride ; I acknowledge that she was for the most part in her undress all day, and that there was fondness and toying with that young wanton ; nay, it was said that I was at the former ceremony ; but it is utterly false ; I neither saw nor heard of any such thing whilst I was there, though I had been in her chamber, and all over that apartment, late enough, and was observing all passages with much curiosity. However, it was with confidence believed that she was first made *a Miss*, as they call these unhappy creatures, with solemnity at the time."

And the writer adds with unconscious irony :

"On Sunday, a young Cambridge divine preached an excellent sermon in the chapel, the King and the Duke of York being present."

Although Evelyn neither saw nor heard anything of the alleged burlesque marriage, it is quite probable that such took place with all the immodest ceremonies of the time, for the story was going the round of the

Court, and the pamphlets which it inspired are, as M. Forneron very truly remarks, "characterized on this occasion by a precision which seems to bear the stamp of truth" and affect to reproduce the very words of the young Frenchwoman, endeavouring to speak in a language with which she is as yet but imperfectly acquainted: "Me no . . . ; if me thought me were a . . . , me would cut mine own throat."

What is certain, is that just nine months after her visit to Euston (July 29, 1672) Louise de Kéroualle gave birth to a son, Charles Lennox, who was to become the ancestor of the present line of Dukes of Richmond, and that Louis XIV. sent orders to his Ambassador to convey his felicitations to the mother. "I have made Mlle. de Kéroualle very joyful," writes Colbert de Croissy to Louvois, "by assuring her that his Majesty would be very pleased that she maintains herself in the good graces of the King. There is every appearance that she will possess them for a long time, to the exclusion of every one else."

CHAPTER IX

INTRIGUES, POLITICAL AND OTHERWISE

NO sooner was he informed that Mlle. de Kéroualle had become the mistress of Charles II., than Louis XIV. endeavoured to turn the influence of the young Frenchwoman to profit. Three advantages were, according to his calculation, to result from the introduction of this new element into English politics: the declaration of war against Holland; the profession of the Roman Catholic faith by Charles, as a preliminary step to the reconciliation of his realm with the Church of Rome; and the marriage of the recently-widowed James, Duke of York, to a princess of his own choosing.

The first was almost immediately assured. In March, 1672, to the intense disgust of a considerable part of the English people, Charles declared war against Holland, this act having been preceded by an unsuccessful attack on the Dutch Smyrna fleet, "a breach of faith," observes Burnet, "such as even Mahometans and pyrates would have been ashamed of, as ridiculous as it was base." At the end of April, Louis XIV., confident of an easy and brilliant triumph

—he carried a tame historian, Pellisson, in his train in order to hand his exploits down to posterity—advanced northwards, at the head of one hundred and twenty thousand men, and his troops poured at once over Holland.

The profession by Charles of the Roman Catholic faith was not so easy to obtain, his Majesty having already received a very unmistakable hint as to the way in which such a step was likely to be regarded by his subjects.

Just before war had been declared against Holland, Charles, in order to conciliate the Protestant Nonconformists, had issued a declaration of indulgence, in which he declared that it was his will and pleasure, in virtue of his supreme power in matters ecclesiastical, that the execution of the penal laws should be immediately suspended. Now, the King's right to dispense with statutes in individual cases was scarcely disputed, but this was a very different thing from a wholesale suspension of a series of Acts of Parliament; and so dangerous did this power appear, both as a step towards arbitrary power and as a means of frustrating the efforts of Parliament in the suppression of Romanism, that the very Nonconformists, whom it was intended to please, opposed it. When in February, 1673, Parliament, which had been prorogued for twenty-one months, at length met, an address was carried begging the King to recall the declaration, and Charles, though complaining bitterly of the opposition of the Commons, dared not contest the matter. The victorious Opposition immediately followed up their success, and three weeks later Charles had given his

assent to the Test Act, which made it impossible for a Catholic to hold office under the Crown.

His Majesty, in consequence, now thought only of finding pretexts for postponing *sine die* a profession of faith, for which he had been so liberally paid in advance, but which seemed likely to lead him into the most embarrassing complications with the mass of his people, and represented to the French Ambassador that the Pope was too old to bring to a happy conclusion a step of such importance, and that the English Catholics were far too weak, both in numbers and in ability, to render him any effective support. His objections were combated by Louise de K  roualle, aided by the Queen's confessor, Father Patrick, who, writes Colbert de Croissy to Louvois, "is very rightly of opinion that religion can only be re-established in England by means of a close union between his Most Christian Majesty and the King of England." Their efforts were futile, however, for Charles did not intend "to go on his travels again" to please any one, and the fate which befell his successor proved how shrewdly he had judged the temper of his people on the question of religion.

Louis XIV. and his fair agent at Whitehall were no more successful in their endeavours to dispose of the hand of the Duke of York. That prince had no sort of hesitation about professing his religion, but to guide his matrimonial aspirations was a difficult matter; so very many ladies were anxious to console him for his bereavement. "All the belles of the Court," writes Colbert de Croissy to Louvois, "bedeck themselves in order to make a conquest of the Duke of

York.”* At first, the widowed Duchess of Northumberland, who was not only beautiful but wealthy, threatened to bear away the prize; then report favoured the candidature of Mary Bagot, widow of Charles Berkeley, Earl of Falmouth, a lady towards whom the King himself was so kindly disposed that in eight months in 1673 she received from him seven thousand pounds. However, Colbert de Croissy “doubted whether the prince’s passion for the widow of the Earl of Falmouth is so great as to lead him to espouse her.”† And he expressed the hope that the ducal affections might incline in the direction of some French princess, if Louis XIV. could see his way to provide her with a suitable *dot*.

Louvois was of opinion that there was no necessity for his Majesty to go to such expense, since they had a well-dowered princess ready at hand and one, moreover, who could hardly fail to present the duke with an heir in the shortest possible time, in the person of the widowed Duchesse de Guise.‡ “If the Duke of York,” he writes, “is desirous of a wife in order to have children, he cannot make a better choice than Madame de Guise, who has been pregnant three times in two years, and whose birth, wealth, and prospects of fecundity appear to me to atone for her want of beauty.”

* Despatch of September 21, 1671, cited by Forneron.

† The Ambassador’s view of the situation proved to be correct, since, after getting all she could out of James’s royal brother, the countess married Nell Gwynn’s old lover, Charles Sackville, who had then become Earl of Dorset.

‡ Élisabeth d’Orléans, second daughter of Gaston d’Orléans, brother of Louis XIII.; married in 1667 Louis Joseph, sixth Duc de Guise, who died in 1671.

The Duke of York, meanwhile, was very far from showing any impatience to put an end to his widowhood. He had lately discarded his mistress, the unlovely Arabella Churchill, and taken unto himself a fresh left-handed consort, Catherine Sedley, daughter of the dissolute poet, Sir Charles Sedley, whose wit she had inherited.* Catherine was, if it be possible, even more ill-favoured than her predecessor in James's affections, being pale, thin, and squint-eyed, and her "elevation" caused Charles II. to observe that she must have been presented to his brother by his confessor as a sort of penance. The damsel—she was only sixteen at the time—seems to have been herself not a little astonished at the distinction conferred upon her. "It cannot be my beauty," said she, "for I have none; and it cannot be my wit, for he has not enough to know that I have any."

This strange infatuation proved very embarrassing for the match-makers, but Colbert de Croissy refused to abandon hope, and assured Louvois that he was neglecting nothing to dispose his Royal Highness to regard a marriage with the Duchesse de Guise with favour. But, though he had the co-operation of both Mlle. de Kéroualle and the prince's confessor in this task, James showed not the slightest inclination to espouse the lady so thoughtfully selected for him. Reversing the usual order of things, he was prepared to tolerate cheerfully enough the lack of physical attractions in a mistress, but not in a wife.

* On becoming king, the Duke of York created Catherine Sedley Countess of Dorchester, and when he was dethroned by his daughter Mary, Sir Charles Sedley is said to have remarked, in voting for the latter in the House of Commons: "He made my daughter a countess; I am making his a queen."



CATHERINE OF BRAGANZA, QUEEN OF CHARLES THE SECOND

From an engraving by S. Freeman, after the painting by Sir Peter Lely.



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Although the King's passion for Mlle. de Kéroualle continued at a very high temperature, the Ambassador's despatches to Versailles show that he was far from easy in his mind in regard to that young lady, and ignored none of the dangers which beset her from the rivalry of old favourites, such as the Duchesses of Cleveland and Richmond, on the one hand, and the fresher theatrical ones, like Nell Gwyn and Moll Davis, on the other. He admits his apprehension that Mlle. de Kéroualle "may easily become the dupe of all these parties, and all the more so, because she does not know how to conduct herself in her good fortune, having got the idea into her head that she may become Queen of England. She talks from morning till night about the ailments of the Queen, just as though they were mortal."

In justice to the new sultana, it should be observed that this view of the Queen's health was very generally held at the time, and Dr. Frazer, one of the King's physicians, after making a careful examination of her Majesty, pronounced that she was in a rapid decline, "which would put an end to her life in two or three months, or, at latest, in a year."

"I am told," writes Colbert de Croissy, "that the moment that God calls this princess to Himself, the King was resolved not to allow a month to pass without satisfying the prayer of his subjects; and that he desired a beautiful wife, of exalted birth, and capable of soon giving him children." But the Ambassador states his conviction that "the doctors only speak in this way in order to ingratiate themselves with the King."

This would appear, indeed, to be the only possible explanation of the extraordinary diagnosis just mentioned, since Catherine of Braganza had still more than thirty-two years of life before her. However, the theologians seemed disposed to come to the aid of the doctors, some of them maintaining that the demise of a barren consort was by no means indispensable to allow of his Majesty taking unto himself a second wife. And so Louise de K  roualle continued to live in hope of one day assuming the crown matrimonial.

That Charles ever seriously contemplated a marriage with Louise de K  roualle, in the event of finding himself free to wed, is highly improbable, for such a step would have aroused the bitterest indignation among the great mass of the nation, who regarded the new mistress as the symbol of French and Papal influence, and warmly applauded the lampoons and satires which were directed against her. Moreover, great as was his infatuation for Louise, it was not sufficient to wean him altogether from the other occupants of his seraglio, and between December, 1671, and October, 1673, Nell Gwyn, the Duchess of Cleveland and Moll Davis all presented him with tokens of their affection. In the case of the Duchess of Cleveland, however, his Majesty refused to acknowledge the child—a daughter—as his own, and, indeed, the paternity was generally attributed to John Churchill, afterwards the celebrated Duke of Marlborough.

The future hero of Blenheim, Oudenarde and Malplaquet was at this time a gay and impecunious young officer in the Guards, and is described as

strikingly handsome, with a profusion of fair hair, strongly-marked, well-shaped eyebrows, blue eyes and refined and clear-cut features. His only blemish was a wart on his upper lip, but this did not detract from his good looks. He had made the amorous duchess's acquaintance through Mrs. Godfrey, his mother's sister, who filled the post of governess to the King's children, and is said to have designedly thrown her handsome nephew in her Grace's way, with a view to furthering his interests.

The result, as she had anticipated, was an immediate intrigue between them, which, however, was conducted with so little discretion that it became known to the Duke of Buckingham. Always eager to seize a chance of doing his enemy an ill turn with the King, the duke, by bribing one of the duchess's servants, so contrived matters that Charles discovered the lovers together in Barbara's bedroom.

A scene followed which has been variously described, one version being that his Majesty shouted sarcastically after his rival, who was making a hurried exit by way of the window: "I forgive you, sir, for I know you do but earn your bread." What is certain, is that this misadventure did not put an end to the intrigue, which was renewed annually during Churchill's winter visits to England throughout the Dutch war, from 1672 to perhaps as late as 1676, and that the gifts which the young Guardsman received from his open-handed mistress, and in particular one of £5,000, with which Churchill prudently purchased an annuity of £500 from George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, helped to lay the

foundation of the wealth of the first Duke of Marlborough.*

The fruit of this *liaison*, a girl, who was called Barbara after her mother, would appear to have inherited that lady's amorous propensities, since at the age of eighteen she had a love-affair with James Douglas, Earl of Arran,

* To supply Churchill with this £5,000, without putting herself to inconvenience, the duchess is said to have extracted double that amount from the notorious spendthrift and rake Sir Edward Hungerford, an incident which is alluded to by Pope in the following lines :

" Who of ten thousand gulled her Knight,
Then asked ten thousand for another night.
The gallant, too, to whom she paid it down,
Lived to refuse his mistress half-a-crown."

The story of Churchill having "refused his mistress half-a-crown" appears to rest upon the authority of the imaginative Mrs. Manby, who relates it in the first volume of "The New Atlantis," wherein Churchill figures as Count Fortunatus and Barbara as the Duchesse de l'Inconstant.

"The Duchess," she says, "who had oftentimes not a pistole at her command, solicited of the Count (whom she had raised by her favour with the Court) that her affairs might be put into a better position, but he was deaf to all her entreaties, nay, he carried ingratitude much further : one night, at an assembly of the best quality, when the Count tallied to them at Basset, the Duchess lost all her money, and begged the favour of him in a very civil manner to lend her twenty pieces, which he absolutely refused, tho' he had a thousand on the table before him, and told her coldly the bank never lent any money. Not a person upon the spot but blamed him in their hearts : as to the Duchess's part, her resentment burst out into a bleeding at her nose, and breaking of her lace, without which aid, it is believed her vexation had killed her on the spot."

Whatever basis of truth there may be in this anecdote, which is described by Curll as a piece of "travelling scandal," it can hardly be said that it was not characteristic of Marlborough. So notorious, indeed, was the great soldier's meanness that when, during his period of unpopularity, the celebrated Earl of Peterborough found himself mistaken for him and his coach beset by a howling mob, he escaped by crying out : "Gentlemen, I can convince you by two reasons that I am not the duke. In the first place, I have only five guineas in my pocket ; and, in the second, they are heartily at your service."

afterwards fourth Duke of Hamilton, killed by Lord Mohun in the celebrated duel of 1707, whom she presented with a son. At the time of the child's birth, Arran was enjoying a period of enforced leisure in the Tower, and the discovery of the intrigue so incensed Queen Mary and the young man's father, the Duke of Hamilton, that they made it a condition of his release that Lady Barbara should retire abroad. She departed accordingly for France, and, having decided to enter religion, made her profession as a nun at the Couvent de Saint-Nicholas at Pontoise, in Normandy, of which house she subsequently became prioress. She died in May, 1737, in her sixty-sixth year.

The love-affair of the Duchess of Cleveland with the future Duke of Marlborough had been preceded by one with William Wycherley, the dramatist, one of the handsomest men about town, whose first play, *Love in a Wood, or St. James's Park*, had just been produced. How it came about is amusingly related by John Dennis, the friend of Wycherley, Dryden and Congreve, in his "Original Letters," and the episode is so characteristic of the morals of the time that we give it in his own words :

"Upon writing his first play, which was *St. James's Park*, he became acquainted with several of the most celebrated wits both of the Court and Town. The writing of that play was likewise the occasion of his becoming acquainted with one of King Charles's mistresses after a very particular manner. As Mr. Wycherley was going through Pall Mall towards St. James's in his chariot, he met the foresaid lady in hers,

who, thrusting half her body out of the chariot, cried out aloud to him, 'You, Wycherley, you are a son of a' at the same time laughing heartily. Perhaps, sir, if you never heard of this passage before, you may be surprised at so strong a greeting from one of the most beautiful and best-bred ladies in the world. Mr. Wycherley was certainly very much surprised at it, yet not so much but he soon apprehended it was spoken with allusion to the latter end of a song in the fore-mentioned play :

When parents are slaves
Their brats cannot be any other,
Great wits and great braves
Have always a . . . to their mother.

"As, during Mr. Wycherley's surprise, the chariots drove different ways, they were soon at a considerable distance from each other, when, Mr. Wycherley, recovering from his surprise, ordered his coachman to drive back and to overtake the lady. As soon as he got over-against her, he said to her : 'Madam, you have been pleased to bestow a title on me which generally belongs to the fortunate. Will your ladyship be at the play to-night ?' 'Well,' she replied, 'what if I am there ?' 'Why, then I will be there to wait on your ladyship, tho' I disappoint a very fine woman, who has made me an assignation.' 'So,' said she, 'you are sure to disappoint a woman who has favour'd you for one who has not.' 'Yes,' he replied, 'if she who has not favoured me is the finer woman of the two. But he who will be constant to your ladyship, till he can find a finer woman, is sure to die your captive.' The lady blushed, and bade her coachman drive away. As she was then in all

her bloom, and the most celebrated beauty that was then in England, or perhaps that has been in England since, she was touched with the gallantry of that compliment. In short, she was that night in the first row of the King's box in Drury Lane, and Mr. Wycherley in the pit under her, where he entertained her during the whole play. And this, sir, was the beginning of a correspondence between these two persons, which afterwards made a great noise in the town."

Voltaire says that Wycherley was "for a long time known to be happy in the good graces of the duchess," and that the lady used to visit him at his chambers in the Temple, "dressed like a country-maid, in a straw-hat, with pattens on, and a basket in her hand;" but we can hardly believe that the haughty Barbara would ever have condescended to such a disguise, even to enjoy the society of a favourite admirer.

Wycherley's romance with the duchess does not appear to have caused the King any resentment, for when, a few years later, the dramatist was recovering from a serious illness, Charles visited him at his lodgings, advised him to winter in the South of France to recruit his health, and gave him a sum of money to defray the expenses of his journey. Subsequently, he offered him the post of tutor to the Duke of Richmond, his son by Louise de K roualle, with a salary of £1,500 a year; but Wycherley's marriage with the widowed Countess of Drogheda* caused him to decline it.

* This lady, who was a daughter of the first Earl of Radnor, appears to have been a veritable dragon of jealousy and to have led her husband, in consequence, far from a happy life. "She was jealous of him to distraction," writes Dennis, "jealous of him to that degree that she could not endure that

The irregularities of the Duchess of Cleveland's life were no doubt the reason why, at the beginning of 1672, the King's visits to her, hitherto of almost daily occurrence, became much less frequent, and for a time ceased altogether. "The King," writes Charles Lyttelton to Lord Hatton, under date February 22, 1672, "has of late forborn visiting my Lady Cleveland, but some two days since was with her again, and I suppose will continue to go sometimes, though it may not be so often." And, a month later, we learn from the same source that "the King goes but seldom to Cleveland House." It is probable that intimate relations between Charles and the duchess had already ceased, and that his Majesty's visits to Cleveland House were merely friendly ones, and paid, perhaps, quite as much to his children as to their mother.

To these children, Charles, ever the kindest of fathers, was much attached, and, though the duchess had lost her hold upon the King's affections, she succeeded in securing the highest honours and great marriages for all of them.

Her eldest son, Charles Fitzroy, who had been installed a Knight of the Garter in 1673, was in September, 1675, raised to the peerage by the titles of Baron Newbury, Earl of Chichester, and Duke of Southampton.

The second, Henry, married on August 1, 1672, to Arlington's little daughter, Isabella Dennet, was the

he should be a moment out of her sight. Their lodgings were in Bow Street, Covent Garden, over against the 'Cock,' where, if he at any time went with his friends, he was obliged to leave the window open, that the lady might see that there was no woman in the company, or she would be immediately in a downright raving condition."

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same month created Earl of Euston, the title being derived from Arlington's country-seat, of which he was the probable heir. In September, 1675, he was made Duke of Grafton.

The youngest of the three boys, George, received, in October, 1674, the titles of Baron Pontefract, Viscount Falmouth, and Earl of Northumberland.

Their two sisters, the Ladies Anne and Charlotte Fitzroy, were married respectively in August, 1674, to Thomas Lennard, fourteenth Lord Dacre, afterwards Earl of Sussex, and to Edward Henry Lee, Earl of Lichfield, a sum of over fifteen hundred pounds being provided out of the Secret Service expenses of the King to defray the cost of their sumptuous wedding-dresses of gold and silver lace. Charles was very fond of both the girls, the elder of whom was to be the cause of not a little trouble to him after her marriage.*

By the Test Act of March 20, 1672-1673, which imposed upon all who held any temporal office the necessity of receiving the Sacraments, according to the rites of the Church of England, and a formal denial of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the Duchess of Cleveland had to resign her post as Lady of the Bed-chamber to the Queen. But, though she thus lost

* Mr. Allan Fea, in his "Some Beauties of the Seventeenth Century," cites a characteristic letter from Charles to Charlotte Fitzroy: "I have had so much business since I came hither that I hope you will not thinke that I have neglected writing to you out of want of kindness to my deare Charlotte. I am going to Newmarket to-morrow and have a great deal of business to despatche to-night. Therefore, I will only tell you now that I have five hundred guineas for you, wch. shall be either delivered to yourself, or any who you shall appoint to receive it, and so, my deare Charlotte, be assured that I love you with all my harte, being your kinde father, C. R."

her official standing at Whitehall, as she had the place she had so long held in the King's affections, she continued to reign as sovereign in all the Court festivities, and from this position the new favourite found it impossible to dislodge her, until, in April, 1677, the duchess migrated to Paris to escape the too-pressing attentions of her creditors.

CHAPTER X

LOUISE DE KÉROUALLE BECOMES DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH

IT must be admitted that, great as was the political influence which Louise de Kéroualle had acquired, she used it with tact and moderation. She appears to have understood the temper of the English people far better than the Ministers at Versailles, or even than the French Ambassador, and very soon came to the conclusion that to force Charles into a profession of the Roman Catholic faith would be a most imprudent step, fatal alike to her own ascendancy and the interests of France. She accordingly begged Colbert de Croissy to represent to Louis XIV. that, if the King of England were to declare himself a Catholic, every one would forsake him, since the bulk of the nation and the majority in the House of Commons was anti-Papal. "One must no longer hope," wrote the Ambassador, "that Charles II. will proclaim himself a Catholic. The Duke of York, by his premature zeal, has ruined this great design. We must think only of insensibly accustoming the people to tolerate Catholicism."

On the question of the marriage of the Duke of York, Mlle. de Kéroualle held different views to the French Government. She was in accord with them so far as the desirability of James's marrying a French princess was concerned; but, whereas Versailles pressed the claims of the Duchesse de Guise, whom Louvois had proposed, the mistress inclined to one of the demoiselles d'Elbœuf,* the young daughters of the Duc d'Elbœuf.

Lionne, the ablest of all Mazarin's pupils, had died at the end of 1671, and had been succeeded as Minister for Foreign Affairs by Arnauld de Pomponne. The new Minister was an excellent man, of considerable ability and great charm of manner, but he did not possess sufficient weight or self-assertion to resist the overbearing temper of Louvois, nor the energy and tenacity required to grapple with difficult situations; and so it was Louvois, rather than the nominal head of the Foreign Office, who now directed the course of French diplomacy.

To the great chagrin of that personage, the reports which he received from London represented the Duke of York as being far from favourably disposed to the proposed marriage with Madame de Guise, an attitude which Colbert de Croissy attributed to the unflattering description which the late Duchesse d'Orléans had given her brother of the widow's personal appearance. "He says," writes the Ambassador, "that he wishes to be content with one wife, and that he wants her to be beautiful."

* Marie Éléonore de Lorraine, born in 1658, and Marie Françoise, born in 1659. Both subsequently became nuns at the Couvent de la Visitation in Paris.

His Excellency added that Charles II. had informed him that he recognized in his brother two great failings; one concerning religion and the other on the subject of marriage; that the first had already done him a great deal of injury, and there was reason to fear would do him still more in the future; while, in regard to marriage, he had perceived, ever since the death of his wife, that he was very disposed "to make a fool of himself a second time," and commit another misalliance; and that, to prevent this, he had suggested to him all the princesses he could think of who were devoted to the interests of France, knowing that the duke was of so uxorious a disposition that he was certain to be governed by his wife.

Louvois, however, refused to abandon his cherished project, and, by his directions, Colbert de Croissy continued to press the claims of Madame de Guise upon the prince's attention; although by so doing the French Court ran the risk of offending James and turning him altogether from the idea of marrying a French princess. Louise de K  roualle, who was on very friendly terms with the Duke of York, perceived the danger of this, and, in an interview with the Ambassador, represented to him the folly of endeavouring to impose a mature and by no means attractive widow upon the duke, who prided himself upon being somewhat of a connoisseur in feminine beauty and had set his heart upon a consort of virginal attractions. "Mlle. de K  roualle," writes Colbert to Louis XIV., "who has caused the Princess of W  rtemberg to be excluded from the list of candidates, has exerted herself at the same time with so much ardour

to cause one of the demoiselles d'Elbœuf to be preferred to any one else, that no one will now listen to the praises of the Duchesse de Guise. Yesterday, in the Queen's chamber, Mlle. de Kéroualle drew me aside and told me that the Duke of York would have preferred Mlle. d'Elbœuf, even if he had found me much less encouraging; and she begged me not to offer any opposition to this marriage, and even to make it known that it would not be disagreeable to your Majesty."*

Thus, the young girl who had held so insignificant a position at the little Court of the Duchesse d'Orléans, had become the patroness of the proud ladies of the House of Lorraine. The Duchesse d'Elbœuf was a daughter of the Duc de Bouillon and sister of the celebrated Maréchal de Turenne, and that she should have permitted Louise de Kéroualle to patronize her daughters was indeed a striking testimony to the political importance which the new favourite of Charles II. had acquired in so short a time.

The demoiselles d'Elbœuf were poor, but Mlle. de Kéroualle counted on their beauty to atone for their lack of riches, and she sent for their portraits and placed them in a conspicuous position in her apartments at Whitehall, in order to accustom the Duke of York to their charms. Colbert de Croissy was indignant at his former *protégée's* conduct, which, in one of his despatches to Pomponne, he ascribes "as much and even more to a desire to demonstrate what power she enjoys as to prove her friendship for this family (the d'Elbœufs.)" He adds that he is doing

* Despatch of July 24, 1673, cited by Forneron.



JAMES, DUKE OF YORK, AFTERWARDS JAMES II.

*From a photograph by Emery Walker, of the painting by Sir Peter Lely at St. James's Palace.
Copyright of H.M. the King.*

everything possible to destroy the web which she was weaving round the heir presumptive to the English throne, but feared that the latter might end by falling a victim to her wiles.

The Ambassador, conscious of his inability to cope single-handed with Mlle. de Kéroualle, summoned Arlington to his aid, and the two remonstrated in strong terms with the young lady, reminded her of the stratagem to which they had stooped to secure her her present exalted position, and reproached her with her ingratitude; Arlington telling her bluntly that she seemed to forget the obligations under which they had placed her as quickly as she did a good dinner.

Their remonstrances would not appear to have had much effect; nevertheless, Mlle. de Kéroualle had the tact to discontinue her efforts on behalf of the demoiselles d'Elbœuf, and to resign herself to the Duke of York's marriage with Mary of Modena, when she learned that Louis XIV. himself was opposed to the alliance which she favoured. For she had private reasons just then for wishing to render herself particularly agreeable to the King of France.

At the beginning of that year the favourite had requested of Louis XIV. permission to become a naturalized British subject, "as a necessary means," wrote Colbert de Croissy to Pomponne, "to enable her to profit by the gifts which the King of England might have the kindness to bestow upon her." This permission was accorded, and the lady's naturalization was followed, in August, 1673, by her being created Baroness Petersfield, Countess of Farnham, and Duchess of Portsmouth,

to the profound disgust of both Court and town—a feeling inspired not by the fact that she was the King's mistress, but because she was a foreigner and a Roman Catholic.

But, though these high-sounding titles were doubtless very gratifying to Louise's pride, they did not content her. In the eyes of the new Duchess of Portsmouth—a true Frenchwoman—a French title would have been infinitely more precious. Her ambition was one day to return to the Court of France, which had known her as a humble and portionless maid-of-honour to the late Duchesse d'Orléans, and to have the privilege of sitting on the coveted *tabouret* in the presence of the Queen, as a French duchess.

The *tabouret* was the ambition of every Frenchwoman, no matter how high the rank she might have attained in a foreign country. When Marie d'Arquien married Jean Sobieski, before he became King of Poland, her one desire, until she assumed the crown matrimonial, was to obtain a *tabouret* at the Louvre; and she importuned her husband to use his influence with Louis XIV. to secure what he termed "this miserable stool," until he was almost distracted. No privilege was more jealously guarded, and though the Sovereign might create a simple gentlewoman who happened to take his fancy a duchess without a protesting voice being raised, he could not bestow a *tabouret* upon the wife of a marquis without running the risk of arousing a perfect storm of indignation among the nobility. In 1650, in the interval between the two Frondes, the Great Condé, at the instigation of his sister, Madame de Longueville, demanded of the Regent *tabourets* for the Princesse

de Marsillac, wife of the celebrated La Rochefoucauld, who had not yet succeeded to the family title, and for the Marquise de Pons, who claimed descent from the House of Albret; and Anne of Austria, unable at the moment to refuse anything to Condé, felt obliged to accede to the request. But the granting of the *tabouret* to the wife of the son of a duke and to a mere marchioness, whose claim to belong to the House of Albret had never been admitted, provoked a veritable tempest of protest from almost the entire aristocracy of the kingdom. Nobles who had regarded the Fronde as "*une guerre pour rire*," who had cared not a sou whether Alsace belonged to France or the Empire, or, indeed, for any question which did not directly affect their own interests, were beside themselves with indignation at the thought that Mesdames de Marsillac and de Pons should have the privilege of being seated in the presence of the Queen, while their own wives were compelled to stand. The Maréchal de l'Hôpital presented to her Majesty a petition signed by an immense number of the nobility, including many of the most illustrious names in France, setting forth their objections to the *tabourets* just conferred, and begging her to revoke them without delay; and several meetings of protest were held at his hôtel. Nor was it until, notwithstanding the remonstrances of Condé, the Regent had consented to withdraw both *tabourets* that the Court resumed its wonted calm.

On the death of the Duke of Richmond, husband of "La Belle Stuart," in December, 1672, the estate of Aubigny-sur-Nièvre, in Berry, which had been raised to a ducal fief in 1422 by Charles VII. in favour of the

duke's ancestor, John Stuart, who had served under that king, had reverted to the Crown of France. In the following July, Charles II. spoke to Colbert de Croissy of his desire "to obtain for Mlle. de Kéroualle the enjoyment of the estate of Aubigny, in such manner that this demoiselle should be able, not only to possess it during her lifetime, but even to dispose of it freely, assuring me that he, on his side, would take precautions to prevent it passing from the Royal House of England, and making me understand that it should remain in the hands of the son whom he has by this demoiselle."*

Colbert de Croissy, who was just then in the midst of his struggle with Louise de Kéroualle on the question of the demoiselles d'Elbœuf, and much irritated against the favourite, transmitted this demand to Versailles with a very bad grace, declaring that, in his opinion, the lady in question was quite undeserving of any favour at the hands of Louis XIV. "But, as it appears," he adds, "that the King of England has much affection and kindness for her, I leave his Majesty to judge what consideration ought to be paid to the request of the said King."

Louis XIV., though unwilling to offend his ally by a refusal of his request, was determined not to grant all that he demanded. Were Aubigny to be given to the Duchess of Portsmouth, it would be detached again from the royal domain, and go, on the duchess's death, into the possession of her son. Well, this son, although now a year old, had not yet been recognized by Charles, the fact being that that monarch, who was just then on very bad terms with the House of Commons, had

* Despatch of Colbert to Pomponne, July 17, 1673.

not considered it expedient to announce the fact that he had had another addition to his family, and the patent creating Louise de K roualle Duchess of Portsmouth provided that the son already born was incapable of succeeding. Louis XIV. had no objection to bestowing a ducal fief on Charles's mistress or to it passing into the possession of a recognized son of Charles, but he did not wish to create Louise a French duchess, and he was strongly opposed to the idea of Aubigny falling to a nameless bastard.

Finally, Colbert de Croissy hit upon a solution of the difficulty. He proposed that a donation of Aubigny should be made in favour of the Duchess of Portsmouth, with remainder to whatever recognized son of Charles he should appoint to succeed her. Thus, Louis XIV. would be able to avoid making the favourite a French duchess; she would merely receive a ducal fief.

The suggested compromise was accepted by Charles, and Louise de K roualle, though sorely disappointed that the title of Duchess d'Aubigny, carrying with it as it did the coveted right to a *tabouret*, had not been accorded her, consoled herself with the reflection that her services were far too valuable to France for it to be withheld for very long.

We are inclined to think that if Charles had pressed for the title which was, for the present, refused his mistress, Louis XIV. would have yielded rather than risk offending the King of England, whose friendship was more than ever necessary to him in the face of the rapidly increasing hostility of the English people to the French alliance, and the enemies which his successes

in the Netherlands had raised up against him. For Louis's ambitious schemes had entirely destroyed the bases of European policy laid down at the Peace of Westphalia; old antagonisms had given way before the dread of a French universal monarchy, and the Emperor, the recognized head of the Catholic world, and the Most Catholic King of Spain had joined hands with William of Orange, the Stattholder of Protestant Holland, to resist the aggressor. Louis, who, having taken Maestricht in the campaign of 1673 and thus cleared the line of the Meuse, had decided that the following year should witness the conquest of Franche-Comté and the invasion of the Palatinate, felt himself to be more than a match for all his foes, provided that he could reckon on the support, or, at any rate, the neutrality, of England; but, should England turn against France and ally herself with Spain, the Empire, and Holland, then, as the Comte d'Estrades wrote to Louvois, "we shall not see in our days the end of this war." And, unfortunately for Louis, he could not disguise from himself the fact that England was slipping from his hands.

On October 20, 1673, Parliament met in a very truculent humour, which only too closely reflected the temper of the nation. The marriage of the Duke of York to Mary of Modena*—a marriage known to have been arranged in deference to the personal wishes of Louis XIV.—which not only opened out the

* James had been married by proxy to Mary of Modena on September 30, 1673, but the princess's arrival in England was delayed by illness until November 21. The populace declared that she was "the eldest daughter of the Pope."

prospect of a long Catholic succession, but expressed in a concrete form the alliance of Charles with France and Catholicism; the frequent and open evasions of the Test Act; the assembling of an army at Blackheath, commanded by a foreigner, Louis de Duras, Earl of Feversham, and largely officered by Catholics; and the almost universal belief that the backwardness of the French squadron in the recent naval engagement with the Dutch had been due to the decision of Louis to see the fleets of the two great maritime Powers destroy each other—had all contributed to exasperate the people against the Government. Member after member rose in the Commons to urge that the granting of supplies should be made conditional on the redress of grievances, and to hint not obscurely that the money voted for the carrying on of the war had been squandered by the King on his favourites and their offspring.* Then they were proceeding to denounce his Majesty's "evil counsellors," when Charles intervened by proroguing Parliament until January 7, 1674.

* It is a somewhat ironical coincidence that at the same time that the Commons were criticizing the morals of their Sovereign, they were advertising the laxity of their own. A violent attack was made upon the conduct of the Speaker, Edward Seymour, by Sir Thomas Littleton and Will Harbord, the latter of whom accused him of "playing and gaming great summes of the publicke money," and also stated that one night a low woman of the town had "brought a bastard to his doore and charged it upon him, which drew five hundred people about his house to learn the matter."

In other respects, it must be admitted that Speaker Seymour worthily upheld the dignity of his office, for we read that one day at Charing Cross, when his coach happened to break down, the beadles by his orders stopped the next which passed, and that Seymour drove away in it, merely observing to the ejected owner that it was fitter for him to walk in the streets than the Speaker of the House of Commons.

During the recess Louis XIV. received secret overtures from the Duke of Buckingham, with a view to selling to the French King the support of his personal friends in the House of Commons.

There was at this time in London a certain Marquis de Sessac, who, having been banished from the Court of France, had taken refuge in England, where, following the example of his compatriot Gramont, he endeavoured to enrich himself by play, though Fortune appears to have bestowed upon him quite as many of her frowns as of her smiles. Among the friends whom he made was Buckingham, who, being badly in need of money, one day sent for the marquis and suggested that he should proceed to Versailles, obtain an audience of Louis, and inform him that the votes and influence of the Duke of Buckingham and his personal following would be entirely at his Majesty's disposal, provided the latter could see his way to reward their zeal in his service in a suitable manner.

To this proposal Sessac readily agreed, seeing in it a chance, not only of filling his purse, but of rehabilitating himself in the eyes of his Sovereign. He proceeded secretly to Versailles, where, through the good offices of the Maréchal de Bellefonds, he succeeded in obtaining an audience of the King, and handed him a letter from Buckingham, in which that worthy professed himself ready to answer for everything, provided he could make sure of the support of certain Members of Parliament, for which purpose "it would be necessary for the king to establish a fund in London."

Buckingham had intended that Sessac's mission

should be conducted without the knowledge of the French Ambassador in London or of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and, on his arrival at Versailles, the marquis had refused to see Pomponne, declaring that the matter on which he had come was for the King's ear alone. However, Colbert de Croissy was not long in discovering what was in the wind, and wrote to Louis that the House of Commons was so embittered against France that there was no hope of being able to corrupt a sufficient number of members "to induce this great assembly to adopt the resolutions which reason alone ought to dictate to it." He also spoke of Sessac in very uncompimentary terms and described him as a man "who liked to talk big and to make people imagine that he was a person of importance," and warned the King that, in encouraging Buckingham's chimerical schemes, he ran the risk of offending Arlington, who was on very bad terms with the duke.

The hostility of the English Parliament threatened so much danger to Louis's plans that the King decided to accept Buckingham's offer, and, since Colbert de Croissy did not seem inclined to work harmoniously with that personage, he sent to England, as secret negotiator, the Comte de Ruvigny, with the intention of substituting him for Colbert a few weeks later.

Ruvigny, who is described by Saint-Simon as "a worthy but simple gentleman, full of intelligence, sagacity, honour and probity," had had a distinguished military career, and was the recognized head of the Reformed Church in France. His family was connected by marriage with that of the Russells, and after

the Edict of Nantes, he and his two sons found an asylum in England, and the younger, Henri de Massue de Ruvigny, who for his military services was raised to the Irish peerage by the title of Earl of Galloway, commanded for a time the British forces in the Peninsula during the War of the Spanish Succession.

Ruvigny was directed to delude Buckingham into the belief that Louis had respected his confidence, and that Charles II. was being kept in entire ignorance of his proposals; "but his Majesty thought proper to inform that prince of this affair," at the same time that he assured the Duke of Buckingham that he would communicate it to no one. Louis appears to have been somewhat ashamed of the part he was playing, for Ruvigny was not allowed to take any written instructions, but requested to read them carefully over and commit them to memory in the presence of Pomponne, and then give the paper back to the Minister. Altogether, it was, as the old soldier afterwards bluntly told the king, "a dirty business."

Moreover, it did not come to anything, for it would appear that Buckingham had been gaily offering to sell at a great price the votes of a faction which, for the time being, had ceased to exist.

On January 7, 1674, the Commons reassembled, more exasperated than ever against the Government and the French Alliance. To remove their suspicions, Charles did not hesitate to resort to the most gross and deliberate lying. He declared that he would lay his treaties with France in their completeness before a committee of both Houses, and he added: "I assure you that there is no other treaty with France, either

before or since, which shall not be made known." The treaty which he showed was, however, the second Treaty of Dover—*le Traité simulé*—which had been executed afresh in February, 1672, in order that Parliament might be the better deceived. The real treaty of June 1, 1670—*le Traité de Madame*—with the damning articles which provided for the announcement of the King's conversion and Louis's subsidy for that purpose, remained unknown until unearthed a century later.

The ruse was only partially successful, and the Commons proceeded to attack the "evil counsellors" of the King, Lauderdale, Buckingham, and Arlington being each in turn the object of their attention. The first and last contrived to parry the attack, but Buckingham fared very badly indeed. A combined assault was made upon him in both Houses. In the Lords, the trustees of the young Earl of Shrewsbury petitioned for redress, alleging that Buckingham was not only ostentatiously living with the countess, but that they had "shamelessly caused a baseborn son of theirs to be interred in Westminster Abbey." The supple Buckingham, who, in anticipation of this attack, had suddenly "become a great convert and, to give a public testimony of it, had gone with his own lady to St. Martin's to church in the afternoon of Sunday last," professed the deepest penitence and "made a very submissive recantation, acknowledging the miserable and lewd life he had led; and, although it was a very heavy burden to lye under the displeasure of the House, yet he hath reason to give God thanks for it, since it had opened his eyes and discovered to him the foulness

of his past life, which he was resolved in the future to amend." Nevertheless, he and Lady Shrewsbury were bound over in the sum of £10,000 to cease to cohabit.

In the Commons, the offences alleged against him were mainly political. He was accused of being the author of the alliance with France and a promoter of Popery and arbitrary government. He was heard twice in his own defence, when he endeavoured to throw all the blame upon Arlington, declaring that, if his advice had been followed, France would not have reaped all the profits of the alliance, but his vindication was inconclusive and unsuccessful; and the House voted an address to the King, praying him to remove the Duke of Buckingham from all employments held during his Majesty's pleasure and from his presence and counsels for ever. Any hesitations which Charles might have had in complying with this demand were overcome by the influence of Louise de K  roualle, who, as we have said, never forgave Buckingham for the humiliation he had inflicted upon her three years before and eagerly embraced the opportunity of revenge which now presented itself.

At the beginning of February, Charles was forced by popular pressure to bring the barren and inglorious Dutch War to a close by concluding a separate peace with Holland. But he had no intention of breaking with so generous a paymaster as Louis, and in April prorogued Parliament at that monarch's bidding, in consideration of a payment of 500,000 crowns.

CHAPTER XI

THE DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH AND NELL GWYN

WHATEVER we may think of Louise de K  roualle—and to English people the mention of her name must always recall that period of disgraceful subservience to a foreign Power which is one of the saddest pages in our country's history—it must be admitted that she, at any rate, conferred a kind of dignity upon her dishonourable post and introduced something of feminine reticence and grace into the anarchy of the royal harem. "Alone among Charles's mistresses," writes one of the ablest of that monarch's historians, "she had a conception of *la haute politique*; she alone in that ignoble Court could command the respect and co-operation of statesmen and ambassadors. She met the vulgar furies of the Duchess of Cleveland and the banter of Nell Gwyn with quiet disdain; she held her own with a certain dignity against the anger of the Commons, the hatred of the people, the attacks of politicians, and the waywardness of Charles, and for many years she was virtually Queen of England."*

* Mr. Osmund Airy, "Charles II."

It was a position, however, which had its drawbacks, and the difficulties we have indicated were not the only troubles with which she had to contend. In the spring of 1674 an enforced separation took place between her and the King, which appears to have lasted for some weeks. Its cause is very frankly explained by Ruvigny, who, early in January, had replaced Colbert de Croissy as French Ambassador, in one of his despatches to Pomponne; and, austere Calvinist though he was, he did not hesitate to jest upon the matter. "She (the duchess) has been consoled," he writes, "for this troublesome present by one which is very much more to her taste. She has had a pearl necklace worth four thousand pounds and a diamond worth six thousand, with which she is so pleased that I doubt not that at the same price she would not object to another attack."

Such presents were doubtless very acceptable, particularly at a time when we learn that the clerks of the Treasury were refusing to pay the expenses of the royal seraglio; but the separation from her royal lover had revived the hopes of Louise's rivals and exposed her, besides, to all kinds of affronts. The physicians had recommended the waters of Tunbridge Wells, and thither she went, pursued by the biting jests of Nell Gwyn. Even there, however, she was not secure from annoyance, for when, on her arrival, she haughtily complained that the Marchioness of Worcester had occupied the house which she wanted herself, that dame declined to give up possession, and tartly reminded her that titles gained by prostitution were not yet regarded as valid in

England. And, to make matters worse, she even reproached her with her former intimacy with the Comte de Sault. To soothe the injured pride of his mistress, the contrite Charles despatched a company of the Guards to bring her back in state to Windsor, where the Court then was, and had her treated by his own physician. Nevertheless, she appears to have suffered a good deal in both body and mind, and could not refrain from reproaching the King with his infidelities, even in the presence of the French Ambassador.

In May, Henriette de K  roualle, Louise's younger sister, arrived in England to try her fortune, and was immediately accorded a pension of six hundred pounds. The duchess had sent for Henriette with the object of marrying her into some great family, and by this means strengthening her own position with the English aristocracy, by whom she was regarded with none too much favour. The girl, notwithstanding the fact that she is described by Ruvigny as "not more than ordinarily attractive," soon found a husband, and in December married Philip Herbert, seventh Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, a suitable dowry being provided for her out of the Privy Purse.

The earl, though a very desirable match as regards family, was certainly not so from any other point of view. He was a man of rough and brutal manners and of the most violent temper, and when he had drunk to excess, which was by no means an uncommon occurrence, became a dangerous maniac, to whom prudent persons took care to give a wide berth. On

one occasion, we read that, when engaged in "treating the jury" who had just given a verdict in his favour in an action he had brought against a relative, he proposed to Sir Francis Vincent, the only man who had had the courage to sit next him, "a small health of two bottles," which Sir Francis refusing to pledge, my lord flung one of the bottles at his head, and afterwards, as the baronet was getting into his coach, attacked him with his sword. Sir Francis, however, was well able to take care of himself. He disarmed his assailant, and then, "scorning to take the advantage, threw away his own sword, flew at him fiercely, beat him, and daubed him daintily;" and finished up by throwing one of the earl's footmen, who had presumed to interfere, into the Thames.

Others, however, were less well able to protect themselves against the murderous attacks of this high-born desperado than the doughty baronet. In November, 1677, Pembroke nearly killed a man in a duel. In the following February, while the House of Lords was engaged in considering the humble petition of one Philip Rycaut, who represented to them that he went in fear of his life owing to the threats of the Earl of Pembroke, and besought them to protect him from his violence, my lord added force to the petition by killing a certain Nathaniel Cong in a drunken brawl in a Haymarket tavern. For this he was committed to the Tower, from which he had only recently emerged, having been sent there by the King as a punishment for "blasphemous words," and tried by his peers for murder. A verdict of manslaughter was returned, and a royal pardon followed.

Encouraged apparently by this misplaced leniency, the earl continued his career of violence, and in August, 1680, while returning "high-flown with wine," with some of his friends, from a drinking-bout at Turnham Green, had an affray with the watch at Chiswick, in the course of which he ran a gentleman of the neighbourhood named Smeethe and a constable named Halfpenny through the body with his sword. Smeethe died the following day, but the other eventually recovered. Once again was Pembroke brought to trial, but, as there appeared to be some doubt as to whether or no he had received provocation—or what so exalted a personage might reasonably consider provocation—he received the King's pardon and was discharged.*

Henriette de K  roualle would not appear to have had a very happy life with her husband, which, however, is scarcely a matter for surprise, nor did his lordship seem properly to have appreciated his good fortune in marrying a lady so closely connected with the Duchess of Portsmouth, although, when he was in

* Several pamphlets were published concerning this affair, and the accounts given are very conflicting. One, entitled "Great and Bloody News from Turnham Green," holds Pembroke up to execration as a murderous desperado and calls for his exemplary punishment. Another, which purports to be "An Impartial Account of the Misfortune that lately happened to the Right Honourable the Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery," ascribes all the blame to the presumption of Smeethe and Halfpenny; denies that this was the twenty-sixth man whom his lordship had killed, "as had been impudently asserted in the coffee-houses," and declares that, so far from being the monster that some people imagined him, he differed in no wise from other men "except that he had more gallantry and honour and could not bear the insolent affronts of the Mobile without resentment." Any way, it seems to have been a very fortunate thing for Pembroke that he had married the sister of the King's mistress, otherwise it might have gone hardly with him.

trouble with the law, he was glad enough to avail himself of his sister-in-law's good offices with the King. Any way, when, in September, 1675, the duchess importuned him to make an adequate provision against his wife's lying-in, as became a person of her quality, and threatened, if he refused, to complain to his Majesty about her sister's grievances, he most ungallantly replied that he would show his family the nation's grievance by setting her on her head at Charing Cross.

Louise de Kéroualle had, of course, not abandoned the hope of obtaining the much-desired *tabouret*, to which her ducal estate of Aubigny was able to give her the right, and in the spring of 1674 we find her approaching Louis XIV. on the matter, through Ruigny, with, however, the greatest diffidence.

"I write to Your Majesty," writes the Ambassador, "at the pressing instance of the Duchess of Portsmouth, who is very troubled, because of a misapprehension on the part of the Marquis de Dangeau. She has requested him, Sir, to make known to you how much she has your service at heart, and how passionate is her desire to acquire your confidence. But, in place of that, she has been informed by him that he had requested of you the assurance of the *tabouret* for her when she should return to France. She has told me that there was so little likelihood of this return, that she does not think about it; but that, being still in a position to serve you, she would ardently desire that you should be persuaded of her passion to do so. I have urged her to write to Your

Majesty; but she replied that she did not dare to do so, on account of the profound respect that she has for Your Majesty.”*

The duchess, indeed, notwithstanding the undoubted services which she was rendering to Louis XIV., never ventured to address that majestic monarch directly; and the demands she made from time to time on his gratitude, which, it must be admitted, were modest enough in the circumstances—an abbey for a relative, some minor post under Government for a friend—came invariably through Ruvigny, and it was generally Charles II., and not the lady, who approached the Ambassador. Moreover, modest as were these requests, they were not always accorded, for Louis XIV. was not over fond of intervention in his affairs, and on one occasion, when petitioned to confer the post of syndic of the Estates of Brittany upon a certain M. de Calloët, he ignored the request altogether, but sent the duchess, by way of consolation, a pair of ear-rings. She received them “with sentiments of great respect and great gratitude,” and begged Ruvigny “to assure his Majesty that she would not omit anything in word or deed for his service.”

On her restoration to health, Louise de Kéroualle speedily succeeded in recovering what ground she had lost by the enforced cessation of her relations with Charles II. and became in higher favour than ever; and in the summer of 1675 she had the satisfaction of seeing her little son recognized by the King and created Duke of Richmond, that title having become vacant by the death of the husband of Frances Stuart. Her

* Ruvigny to Louis XIV., March 15, 1674.

satisfaction, however, was somewhat discounted by the fact that the Duchess of Cleveland had also obtained for her second son, Henry Fitzroy, Earl of Euston, the title of Duke of Grafton, and demanded that he should have precedence over the Frenchwoman's son. The question of precedence, of course, depended upon the date of creation, and the very foundations of Charles's peace were shaken by the contest which ensued. He weakly proposed to make the creation at the same moment, but both ladies scorned to consent to the suggested compromise, and each resolved to endeavour to steal a march upon the other. Thanks to the friendly understanding which existed between her and the Lord Treasurer, the Earl of Danby, Louise succeeded in triumphing over her rival.

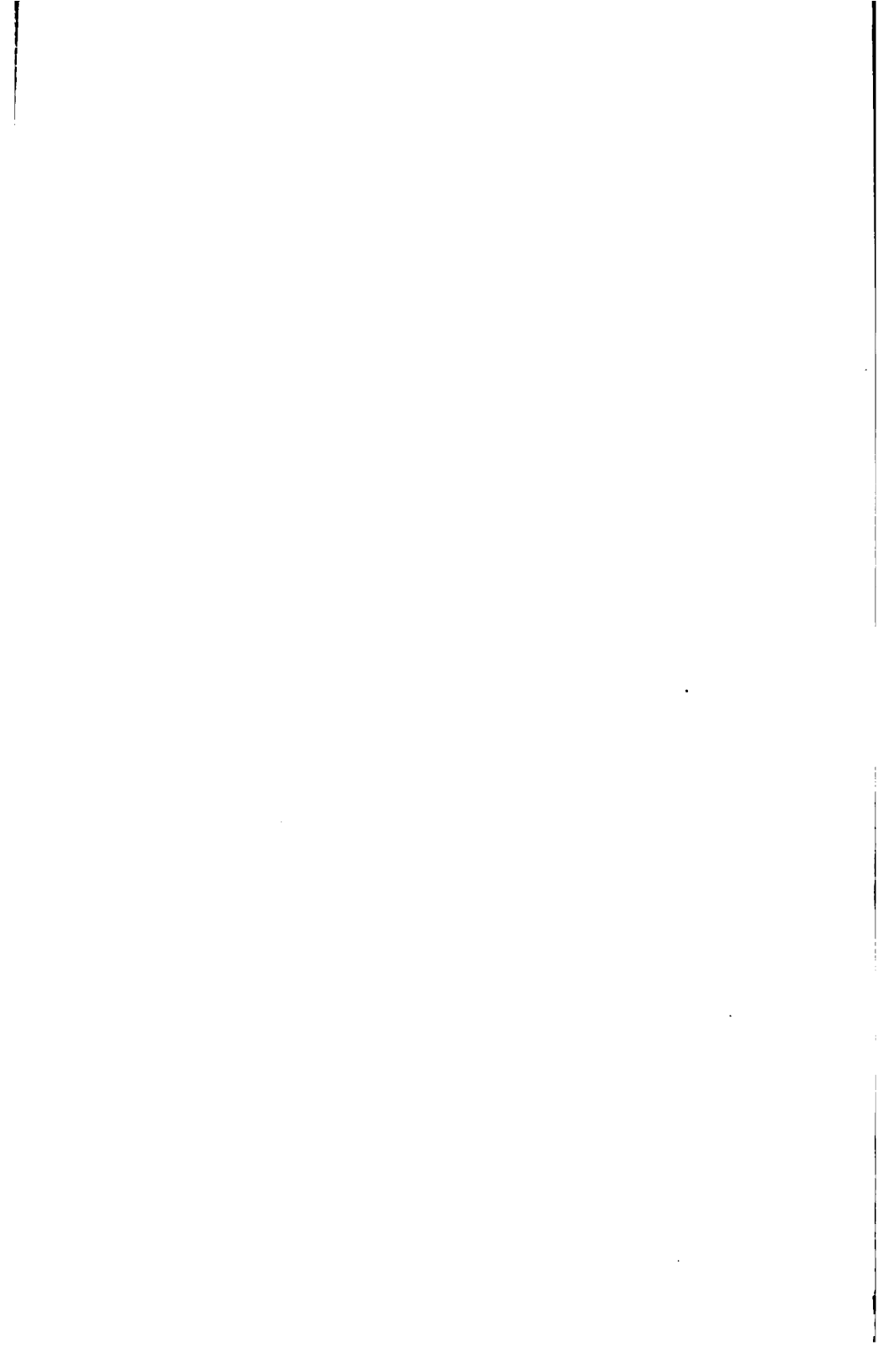
"Corrupt himself and a corrupter of others," Danby, on becoming Lord Treasurer and chief Minister in June, 1673, had lost no time in making himself safe in a quarter where opposition was to be so much dreaded, and had begun by volunteering to raise the money for a pearl necklace and a pair of diamond pendants which the favourite had bought, but which the vendors meanly refused to deliver until the cash was forthcoming. Between a Minister in need of support and a mistress in need of money, it was easy to form an alliance, and thus is explained the sudden coalition between the two, which puzzled people at the time.

The patents had been made out, each bearing the same date; but they, of course, required to be sealed by the Lord Treasurer. Well, Danby was leaving London the following day for Bath, to drink the waters,



THOMAS OSBORNE, FIRST DUKE OF LEEDS

From an engraving by Freeman, after a painting by V'ander V'aart.



and the Duchess of Cleveland instructed her man of law to wait upon the Minister with her son's patent as early as possible the following morning, so that there might be no danger of her being forestalled. Late that evening, however, Louise learned that Danby's plans had been changed, and that, instead of waiting until the morrow, he intended to start at midnight. Hastily summoning her agent, she despatched him with all speed to the Treasurer's house, where he arrived at the very moment when the Minister was getting into his travelling-carriage. Danby, though by no means pleased at an audience being demanded of him at such an hour, did not dare to refuse a request from the Duchess of Portsmouth; and the Duke of Richmond's patent was sealed before he set out. Early next morning came the Duchess of Cleveland's agent, only to find that he was too late; and the fury of his employer when she learned how cleverly she had been jockeyed may be well imagined.

At the end of the previous year, both duchesses had had pensions of £10,000 a year settled upon them; that of the Duchess of Portsmouth was to be paid out of the wine-licenses; but the Duchess of Cleveland preferred the Customs, as a part of the revenue less subject to be interfered with by Parliament. The latter's pension was, of course, in addition to those which she already enjoyed, for Charles's liberality towards her seemed to increase as his affection waned, probably with the object of bridling her rancorous tongue. But there was no satisfying her rapacity, and even the Irish treasury was laid under contribution. Charles actually gave her a grant of the Phoenix Park

in Dublin, and the design was only abandoned when the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Essex, protested against the outrage as "one of the most unscrupulous things I have ever known," and offered to persuade the Irish Parliament to levy a small tax to redeem it.

Though not avaricious, like her predecessor in the royal affections, Louise's vanity produced much the same effects. She loved to make the enamoured King spend enormous sums on her whims, merely for the pleasure of proving her power over him. Her splendid apartments at Whitehall, situated at the southern extremity of the Privy Garden—the subsequent site of Richmond House, the London home of the second duke, her grandson, and, in recent times, of Richmond Terrace—which caused her to be sometimes alluded to as "the lady at the end of the Gallery," were furnished, Evelyn tells us, ten times more sumptuously than those of the Queen, with "massy pieces of plate, and tables and stands of incredible value,"* and were one of the sights of London, which people came to visit out of curiosity.

Enviably as seemed her position, it was, as we have seen, not without its drawbacks; beds of roses have their hidden thorns, and one of the sharpest in that of her Grace of Portsmouth was Nell Gwyn. It was necessary, both to the Frenchwoman's vanity and to the interests she represented, that she alone should possess the King's heart and be admitted to his confidence. Well, there was nothing more to fear from the Duchess of Cleveland, from whom his Majesty's affections were now altogether estranged, though she continued to reap very substantial advantages from his

* Diary, September 10, 1675.

former infatuation. But Nell still remained as high in favour as ever. The little actress, with her boisterous gaiety and her Cockney wit, was Charles's playmate—an essential part of his life—and, though Louise might pout and sulk as much as she pleased, no amount of persuasion on her part could induce him to give Nell up.

In Pall Mall, Nell kept as "merry" a house as she and Lord Buckhurst had kept during that brief July jaunt to Epsom. There she gave boisterous supper-parties to "the merry gang," as her friends were called, at which the singing and carousing often went on until the small hours of the morning. To these revels the most prominent politicians of the day considered it a privilege to be invited, for both Charles and the Duke of York frequently honoured the company with their presence and appear to have enjoyed themselves hugely. Colley Cibber, in his "Apology," relates an amusing story which he had from Bowman, the singer, who had, when a young man, been asked to one of Nell's parties, together with some other professionals, to divert the royal brothers. When the music was over, the King praised it warmly. "Then, Sir," said Nell, "to show that you do not speak like a courtier, I hope you will make the performers a handsome present." The King, after feeling in his pockets, said he had no money, and asked the Duke if he had any. "I believe, Sir, not above a guinea or two." Upon which Nell, with a comical expression of astonishment, turned to the company. "Odd's fish!" cried she, making bold with his Majesty's favourite oath, "what company am I got into!"

Nell's wit was not as a rule of the most refined

description, but it never failed to amuse Charles, who had a weakness for full-flavoured jests. One day, for example, when he was complaining of want of money, she advised him to put the Commons into a better humour by treating them to a French *ragoût*, a Scotch collops, and a calf's head, meaning that he should propitiate them by dismissing the Duchess of Portsmouth, Lauderdale, and Sunderland. At which, we are told, "his Majesty laughed and was well pleased."

To Nell's credit, it must be said that she was neither rapacious like the Duchess of Cleveland, nor did she, like Louise de Kéroualle, make the King spend huge sums upon her merely to gratify her vanity. That she was extravagant goes without saying, and no doubt from first to last she cost Charles a good round sum; but her regular income was not more than £4,000 a year, and even allowing for the gifts which she received from him from time to time, the amount spent on her must have been a mere trifle compared with what the two duchesses managed to extract from both the King and the nation.* Her most expensive taste appears to have been a fondness for silver ornaments. Among the bills of hers which have been preserved is one dated 1674, from "John Cooqūs, siluersmyth," in which the principal charge is one for

* Burnet asserts, on the authority of Buckingham, that when Nell was first "sent for" by the King, she demanded five hundred a year, and that Charles refused it, but that in four years she got from him sixty thousand pounds. The accuracy of Burnet's statements, where his political partisanship is involved, is not above suspicion, while no one would attach any importance to the word of "all mankind's epitome." That Nell, who was a practical young woman, bred in a hard and sordid school, should have asked for a provision is natural enough; but that Charles, who was generosity itself to his mistresses, should have refused so very modest a demand is highly improbable.

making a bedstead for "y^e righte Hon^{ble}. Madame Guinne," with ornaments of silver, such as the King's head, slaves, eagles, crowns and Cupids, and Jacob Hall, dancing upon a rope of wirework. The bill is far too lengthy to give in its entirety, but some items from it may not be without interest for the reader :

" Delivered the head of y^e bedsteed weighing 885 ounces
12 lb. and I have received 636 ounces 15 dweight so that
their is over and above of me owne silver two hundred
[and] forty-eight ounces 17 dweight at 7s. 11d. par once (y^e
silver being a d't worse par once according y^e reste) £ s. d.
wich comes to 98 10 2

For y^e making of y^e 636 ounces 15 d't at 2s. 11d. per
once, comes to 92 17 3

	ounces	dweight
Delievred y ^e Kings head weighing	197	5
one figure weighing	445	15
y ^e other figure with y ^e carактер weighing	428	5
y ^e slaves and y ^e reste belonging unto it	255	
y ^e two Eagles weighing	169	
one of the crowne [s] weighing	94	5
y ^e second crowne weighing	97	10
y ^e third crowne weighing	90	2
y ^e fowerd crowne weighing	82	
one of y ^e Cupids weighing	121	8
y ^e second boye weighing	101	10
y ^e third boye weighing	93	15
y ^e fowered boye weighing	88	17

Altogether two thousand two hundred sixty five ounces,
2d wight of sterling silver at 8s. par once, comes to . 906 0 10

Paid for jacob haale [Jacob Hall] dansing upon y^e robbe
[rope] of Weyer Worck 1 10 0

Paid to y^e cabbenet maker for y^e greatte bord for y^e
head of the bedstead and for the other bord that comes
under it and . . . booring the wholles into y^e head . 3 0 0

For y^e bettering y^e sodure wich was in the old bed-
stead 5 3 7

And so on, the total amount of the bill coming to
£1135 3s. 1d. *

* Cunningham, " The Story of Nell Gwyn."

With the mass of the people, Nell was exceedingly popular. She had been so with them when she was on the stage, and her change of fortune seems to have rather increased than diminished her popularity. Nor is this surprising, for she was one of themselves, while the Duchess of Cleveland was regarded as an aristocratic harpy, battenning on the nation, and Louise de K  roualle—or “Mrs. Carwell,” as she was called by the populace—as a French spy. She was generous and free-hearted, too, almost to excess, and no one in genuine distress who appealed to her for assistance ever went empty-handed away. On one occasion, she saw a clergyman being haled off to prison. She stopped her coach and inquired the reason, and, on being told that he had been arrested for debt, paid for the poor man’s liberty on the spot. As for those who had helped her in her early days and her old comrades at the King’s Theatre, none of them was forgotten, and, what is more, she assisted them without any affectation of patronage. For Nell was far too honest to give herself the airs and graces assumed by the majority of queens of the left-hand, or to pretend that she was anything but what she was—a woman of the people, who had carried her charms to the best market available. She would seem, indeed, to have taken a positive pleasure in describing herself by a word which, in deference to the modesty of the modern reader, is commonly expressed by a blank. Thus, one day, when she found her coachman fighting with another man and called upon him for an explanation, she was informed that his opponent had had the insolence to apply the aforesaid objectionable



NELL GWYN WITH HER TWO SONS

From an engraving by Thompson, after Lely.

epithet to his mistress. Nell laughed good-humouredly and observed that she supposed the fellow was right. "You may be called a —," was the retort, "but I will not be called a —'s coachman."

Between two women, so different in every respect as Nell Gwyn and Louise de K roualle, the clash was, of course, inevitable; and it began from the moment that the latter arrived at Whitehall. For the haughty, high-bred Frenchwoman could not disguise her disdain for this noisy, ill-mannered creature from the London slums, who, for some inscrutable reason, had caught the King's fancy, and whom his Majesty had had the bad taste to introduce into the society of ladies of quality, when decency should have required him to keep her out of sight. Nell, as might be expected, was not slow to retaliate, and some of the shafts of ridicule which she aimed at her rival must have bitten pretty deep, as the following incident will show.

Louise sometimes rendered herself rather absurd by affecting to claim relationship with various distinguished families in France. Thus, when, in December, 1674, the news of the execution of the misguided Chevalier de Rohan reached England,* she appeared at Court in deep mourning, to create the impression that she was a near relative of the Rohans. Next day, Nell also made her appearance shrouded in deepest black, and was asked, in the hearing of the duchess, for

* The Chevalier de Rohan, having fallen into disgrace at Court, and finding himself almost ruined, had sought to better his fortunes by entering into treasonable negotiations with the Dutch, but was detected, brought to trial, and beheaded in front of the Bastille (November 27, 1674).

whom she had assumed these habiliments of woe. "Why!" said she, "have you not heard of my loss in the death of the Cham of Tartary?" "And what relation, pray," continued the questioner, "was the Cham of Tartary to you?" "Oh," answered Nell, "exactly the same relation that the Chevalier de Rohan was to the Duchess of Portsmouth." This, we are told, was a jest after the King's own heart.

It was indeed galling to be exposed to jests of this nature; but what was the good of complaining, when Charles himself was the first to laugh at them.

"Kéroualle," writes Madame de Sévigné, "has been deceived in nothing; she wished to be mistress of the King, and she is; he passes almost every night with her, before the eyes of the whole Court; she amasses treasures, and makes herself feared and respected by as many as she can. But she did not reckon to find in her way a young actress, by whom the King is bewitched, and she is powerless to detach him from her for a moment. He divides his attentions, his time, and his health between the two. The actress is as proud as the Duchess of Portsmouth; she defies her; she makes grimaces at her; she attacks her, and frequently steals the King away from her, and boasts that she is the most loved of the two. She is young, reckless, bold, debauched, and of a merry humour. She sings, dances, and acts her part quite frankly. She has a son by the King, and intends to have him acknowledged. This is how she reasons: 'This duchess sets up to be a person of quality; she says that she is related to all the best families in France; whenever any person of distinction there

dies, she goes into mourning. Very well! if she be a person of such high station, why does she demean herself to be a courtesan? She ought to die of shame. As for me, it is my profession; I do not pretend to be anything else. The King keeps me, and I am faithful to him. I have a son by him, whom I contend that he ought to acknowledge, and I feel sure that he will recognize him, for he loves me as much as he does his Portsmouth.' This creature is in possession of the inner side of the pavement, and disconcerts and embarrasses the duchess to an extraordinary degree."

It must not be supposed that the two ladies were always quarrelling, for Nell was too good-humoured a woman to attack any one unless under provocation; while Louise had too exalted an idea of her own importance to engage continually in unseemly wrangles. Frequently they met at Whitehall on outwardly friendly terms, and the duchess even occasionally condescended to honour Nell's basset-table in Pall Mall with her presence and to win large sums from her rival, who, like herself, was an incorrigible gambler. Nevertheless, the hostility between them was too deep to be ever eradicated, and no one seems to have been deceived by this pretence of amicable relations.

The rivalry of Nell Gwyn, greatly as it was resented by the Duchess of Portsmouth, was a source of annoyance rather than of danger to her; and, as the little actress was far too feather-headed to care about politics, it never in any way threatened the interests which Louise represented. But at the beginning of

the year 1676, the duchess found herself called upon to face an infinitely more formidable competitor for the royal favour; one against whom she was to be compelled to employ all the resources at her disposal.

CHAPTER XII

MADAME DE MAZARIN ENTERS THE LISTS

ON January 2, 1676, we find the French Ambassador, Ruvigny, writing to inform Pomponne that "the Duchesse de Mazarin had arrived two days previously in London, dressed as a cavalier, accompanied by two women and five men, without counting a little Moor, who takes his meals with her."

Hortense Mancini, Duchesse de Mazarin, was the fourth of the five fair Mancini sisters,* nieces of Cardinal Mazarin, and the pick of the bunch as regards physical attractions; in fact, she was one of the most beautiful women of her time.

"Hortense eût du ciel en partage
La grâce, la beauté, l'esprit,"

sang La Fontaine.† But, if she were one of the most

* The five sisters were: Laure, Duchesse de Mercœur (1637-1657); Olympe, Comtesse de Soissons (1640-1708); Marie, Constableness Colonna (1641-1715); Hortense, Duchesse de Mazarin (1646-1699); Marianne, Duchesse de Bouillon (1649-1680). For a full account of their careers see the author's "Five Fair Sisters" (London, Hutchinson; New York, Putnam, 1906).

† Marie Mancini speaks of her sister as a woman "whose beauty surpassed all imagination, and in whom one discovered each time one saw her new charms;" while Saint-Évremond, who cherished for the beautiful duchess a boundless admiration, has left a portrait of her which sounds almost fabulous:

beautiful, she was also one of the most extravagant, and few have succeeded in acquiring so much undesirable notoriety.

The suitors for Hortense Mancini's hand had been well-nigh as numerous as those of Penelope, which is not surprising when it is remembered that not only was the girl gifted with quite extraordinary beauty, but that it was an open secret that her uncle, whose favourite niece she was, intended to bequeath her the bulk of his vast wealth. The Cardinal, however, was very hard to please, and most of them were very quickly sent about their business. Among those, however, who received more consideration at his hands were two future sovereigns, Pedro II. of Portugal and Charles II. of England.

"She is one of those Roman beauties who in no way resemble your dolls of France . . . the colour of her eyes has no name ; it is neither blue, nor grey, nor altogether black, but a combination of all the three ; they have the sweetness of blue, the gaiety of grey, and, above all, the fire of the black . . . there are none in the world so sweet . . . there are none in the world so serious and so grave when her thoughts are occupied with any serious subject . . . they are large, well-set, full of fire and intelligence . . . all the movements of her mouth are full of charm, and the strangest grimaces become her wonderfully, when she imitates those who make them. Her smiles would soften the hardest heart and ease the most profound depression of mind ; they almost entirely change her expression, which is naturally haughty, and spread over it a certain tincture of sweetness and kindness, which reassures those hearts which her charms have alarmed. Her nose, which without doubt is incomparably well-turned and perfectly-proportioned, imparts a noble and lofty air to her whole physiognomy. The tone of her voice is so harmonious and agreeable that none can hear her speak without being sensibly moved. Her complexion is so delicately clear that I cannot believe that any one who examined it closely can deny it to be whiter than the driven snow. Her hair is of a glossy black, with nothing harsh about it. To see how naturally it curls as soon as it is let loose, one would say it rejoiced to shade so lovely a head ; she has the finest turned countenance that a painter ever imagined."

Why Mazarin refused the overtures of Pedro, then Regent of his future kingdom, does not appear to be known; but it is not improbable that, since Portugal was at war with Spain, the marriage of his niece to its ruler might be resented by the latter country, and interfere with the progress of the negotiations for peace between France and Spain, and the marriage of Louis XIV. to the Infanta Maria Teresa, which were then in progress.

However that may be, political considerations were certainly responsible for the rejection of Charles II.'s suit. During the conferences between Mazarin and the Spanish Prime Minister, Don Luis de Haro, on the Île des Faisans, in the autumn of 1659, Charles journeyed thither, in the hope of persuading France and Spain to assist him in an attempt to recover his kingdom, and, with the idea of binding the Cardinal to his cause and of replenishing his empty coffers, asked for Hortense's hand. But Mazarin was resolved not to break with the existing Government in England, so long as there was a possibility of renewed war with Spain; and, besides, in common with nearly all Continental statesmen, he considered Charles's chance of recovering the throne which his father had forfeited a very remote one, even with foreign aid. And so he gracefully declined the honour, by insisting that, "so long as a cousin of his Majesty's (*i.e.*, Mlle. Montpensier) remained unmarried, he must not be of a simple demoiselle."^{*}

Danmud Airy, "Charles II." Mlle. de Montpensier, in her *Mémoires*, the day after the Cardinal, having signed the peace, arrived at Saint- where the Court then was, he came to visit her, and said: "The

Could Mazarin have foreseen that, in a few months from that date, without a single European sovereign stirring a finger to help him, the King would come to his own again, his answer would no doubt have been a very different one; and, indeed, scarcely was Charles seated on the throne, than the Cardinal, judging him to be still in need of money, sent his confidential agent, Bartet, to London, to offer him Hortense and five million livres with her. Henrietta Maria, who had just concluded the marriage of her daughter with the Duc d'Orléans, showed herself very favourable to the Cardinal's project, and urged her son to accept the lady and the dowry. But Charles's position was growing stronger daily; the signs of hostility which had at first manifested themselves in the Parliament and the Army had almost entirely disappeared; while his counsellors were, of course, strongly opposed to such an alliance. And so, to the intense mortification of the Cardinal, the King, not, we may suppose, without a biting jest or two about the irony of Fate, declined what he had once solicited so humbly.

When Mazarin found that his days were numbered, he determined to have done with kings and princes, and to give Hortense and her wealth to some French nobleman, who would assume and perpetuate his

King of England has proposed to marry my niece Hortense. I replied that he did me too much honour, but, so long as there were first cousins of the King to marry" (meaning Mlle. de Montpensier), "I must decline." *Mademoiselle* adds that she thanked him, and strongly urged him to give Hortense to the King of England. . . . "I learned that, on the death of Cromwell, the Queen of England (Henrietta Maria) had made the same proposal to the Cardinal, who had rejected it. The last time it was M. de Turenne who made it. He took great interest in that which concerned the King of England."

name; and on February 28, 1661, ten days before the Cardinal's death, the girl, then in her sixteenth year, was married to Armand Charles de la Porte, Marquis de la Meilleraie, Grand Master of the Artillery, whom Louis XIV., at his Eminence's request, immediately afterwards created a duke, by the title of Duc de Mazarin.

Hortense embarked upon marriage under what appeared to be the most favourable auspices. She had inherited the bulk of the Cardinal's vast fortune, and had for her residence the finest part of that wonderful Palais-Mazarin, filled with priceless pictures and the rarest marbles, and which surpassed the Louvre itself in the richness of its exterior. She was a duchess, their Majesties' cousin, courted and adulated by all. Finally, she was married to a man who loved her passionately, and for whom, at the time of her marriage at least, she appears to have entertained a strong liking. Her life ought then to have been one of the happiest; the very reverse was the case.

For this unfortunate result, Hortense herself was, in a great measure, to blame. Her coquetry, incurable frivolity, foolishness, and complete absence of moral sense, were not calculated to please even the most complacent of husbands; but, in justice to her, it should be added that even a paragon of virtue would have found it difficult to live on amicable terms with the Duc de Mazarin.

The duke was of a singularly unprepossessing countenance ("He bore on his face the justification of his wife's conduct," wrote Madame de Sévigné); but in other respects he seemed likely to make an

excellent husband. His life, in a licentious age, had been beyond reproach; he was well-educated, open-handed, a charming companion, and distinguished for his courtly manners. But some latent germ of insanity there must have been lurking in his temperament, which, under the influence of conjugal jealousy and religious fervour, changed him, before he had been married many months, into one of the most ridiculous and, at the same time, one of the most tyrannical of husbands to be met with outside the domain of fiction, only not mad enough to be shut up, because Louis XIV. found his inexhaustible purse too convenient to borrow from.

"Piety," says Saint-Simon, "poisoned all the talents which Nature had bestowed upon him." He was the Alceste of good morals, but the devotees by whom he was surrounded made of him an Orgon. He threw himself into the most extravagant devotion; he became a seer of visions, a dreamer of dreams.* He conceived the most unheard-of scruples, and did not hesitate to give expression to them. The magnificent collection of paintings and statues in the Palais-Mazarin shocked his views, nor did he content himself, like Tartuffe, with throwing his handkerchief over the Michaelangelos and Titians which offended him by an improper nudity; but, with a hammer in one hand and a paint-pot in the other, made a tour of the galleries, demolishing the statues and smearing

* One day, he demanded an audience of Louis XIV., and gravely told him that he had been informed by the Angel Gabriel that some terrible misfortune would befall his Majesty, if he did not immediately break off his connection with Louise de la Vallière.

over the pictures. He issued an order forbidding the women and girls on his estates to milk the cows, such an operation being, in his opinion, a most indelicate one for a woman to undertake; and was only with difficulty dissuaded from having his daughters' teeth extracted, because, being pretty, he feared that they might become vain.

"He used to cast lots for his servants," says Saint-Simon, "in such a way that the cook became his intendant and the floor-scrubber his secretary. The lot, according to him, indicated the will of God." The same chronicler relates that once, when a fire broke out at one of his country-seats, he refused to allow the servants to extinguish it, declaring that to do so would be to interfere with the intentions of the Almighty.

But it was his unfortunate young wife who had to bear the brunt of his vagaries. If we are to believe only half of what she tells us in her *Mémoires*, he must have led her a truly terrible life. He was jealous of everyone who addressed or approached her, high or low, man or woman. "I could not speak to a servant, but he was dismissed the same day. I could not receive two visits in succession from the same man, but he was forbidden the house. If I showed any preference for one of my maids, she was at once taken away from me. He would have liked me to see no one in the world, except himself. Above all, he could not endure that I should see either his relations or my own—the latter, because they had begun to take my part; his own, because they no more approved of his conduct than did mine." He found fault with everything she did, and the innocence of her recreations

occasioned him as much annoyance as if they had been criminal.*

The duchess, according to her own account, bore her husband's eccentricities with exemplary patience; but when she found on her return from some Court function that M. de Mazarin had taken advantage of her absence to seize upon her jewels, her fortitude was exhausted and she appealed to her relatives for protection. Alternate separations and reconciliations between the ill-assorted couple ended in an open rupture, and in 1666 the duchess brought an action for judicial separation against her husband before the Cour des Enquêtes of the Parliament of Paris.

While awaiting the result of the trial, the lady consented to retire to the Abbey of Chelles, from which, however, her husband, fearing that she was enjoying too much liberty, obtained permission from the King to remove her to the Couvent des Filles de Sainte-Marie, near the Bastille, a most rigorous institution. Here she found a companion in misfortune in the person of Sidonie de Lenoncourt, Marquise de Courcelles, and the two penitents appear to have led the poor nuns such a life with their practical jokes that the latter petitioned the King for their removal,† and Madame de Mazarin, much to her relief, was sent back to Chelles.

* *Mémoires de la duchesse de Mazarin.*

† Madame de Mazarin in her *Mémoires*, however, declares that they were shamefully maligned. "As Madame de Courcelles was very amiable and very entertaining," she writes, "I had the complacency to join with her in some pleasantries which she played upon the nuns. A hundred ridiculous tales about this were carried to the King, who was told that we put ink in the holy-water basin to bespatter the good ladies, that we ran through the dormitories, accompanied by a pack of dogs, shouting out: *Tayaui! Tayaui!* and such

M. de Mazarin, accompanied by a troop of cavalry, and armed with an authorization from the Archbishop of Paris, attempted to enter the convent and seize his wife ; but the abbess refused him admission, and a decree of the Cour des Enquêtes decreed that the duchess should be set at liberty and reinstated in the Palais-Mazarin, while her husband was to reside at the Arsenal, the official residence of the Grand Master of the Artillery. The duke, however, refused to accept this decree, and immediately appealed to the Grande Chambre ; and Madame de Mazarin, fearing that the day might go against her, and that she would be condemned to return to her detested husband, decided to leave France. Her brother, the Duc de Nevers, and the Chevalier de Rohan,* who passed for her lover, aided her in this project, and on June 13, 1668, disguised as a man and accompanied by one of her waiting-women, similarly attired, and an equerry of the chevalier named Couberville, she left Paris on horseback, and rode without drawing rein, except to change horses, to Nancy. Here she was well received by Charles IV. of Lorraine, who, ever the slave of the fair, naturally sympathized with her misfortunes, and gave her a troop of horse to escort her as far as Geneva. Finally, at the beginning

like things, all of which were absurdly false or grossly exaggerated. For example, having asked for some water to wash our feet, the nuns disapproved and refused our request, just as if we were there to observe the regulations. It is true that we filled a large coffer which stood in our dormitory with water, and, the boards of the floor being very loosely joined together, the water which overflowed leaked through the wretched floor and wetted the beds of the good sisters. This accident was talked about as if it had been something which we had done of design."

* See p. 173 *supra*.

of July, still escorted by Couberville, she arrived at Milan, where she found her sister Marie, and the latter's husband, the Constable Colonna, who, warned of her coming, had travelled thither to meet her.

At Milan, the duchess, to the surprise of her relatives, evinced a singular dislike for society, remaining in her apartments all day, and seeing no one but her sister and her immediate attendants; but their surprise gave way to anger and mortification when it presently transpired that the reason for this sudden taste for solitude was a violent passion which the lady had conceived for Couberville. Soon this affair had become the talk of the city, and people made ribald verses about it, to the intense disgust of the Colonnas and the Duc de Nevers, who had lately arrived at Milan. In consequence, they cut short their stay at Milan and removed to Sienna, and thence to Rome. Here, Madame de Mazarin, indignant at the remonstrances of her relatives and at the manner in which they had treated Couberville, who, on some pretext, had been arrested by order of the Constable Colonna and imprisoned in a fortress, left the Casa Colonna and went to live with her aunt, Signora Martinozzi. Learning, however, that the Duc de Mazarin was petitioning the Pope to have her sent to a convent, she anticipated him by retiring to the Convent of Campo-Marzo, of which another of her aunts was the Superior, and where she could reckon on being allowed to do pretty much as she pleased. She had not been there long, however, when she fell into "a state of profound melancholy," and confessed to her sister Marie, who visited her nearly every day, that an interesting event, in which M. de Mazarin had

certainly no concern, was pending. The situation was most embarrassing, as Hortense could not leave the convent without the consent of her husband or the Pope; and they were at a loss what to do. Eventually, however, Marie solved the problem by aiding her sister to escape, and bearing her off in her coach, before the eyes of the indignant nun,* to the Palazzo Mancini, which had been bequeathed by Mazarin to the Duc de Nevers, though their uncle, the Cardinal Mancini, was at present residing there.

This unfortunate termination to her romance with Couberville does not appear to have had a very chastening effect upon the volatile duchess, who, to the mortification of her friends, declined to make the least attempt to conceal her condition, went frequently into society, and appeared extremely pleased with herself. At the fêtes which followed the election of Cardinal Rospigliosi (Clement X.) Pope, in the spring of 1670, she was among the gayest of the gay, and was perpetually surrounded by a crowd of adorers, who contended for the first place in her favours with so much acrimony that on more than one occasion a duel was with difficulty prevented.

In the autumn, the Duc de Nevers, who had been residing in Rome since the previous winter, set out on his return to France, and Madame de Mazarin, who was, perhaps, beginning to find the welcome which her friends had at first extended to her growing a trifle cold, and was, besides, in need of money—she had been, she

* "My old aunt [the abbess]," writes Madame de Mazarin, "took the matter so much to heart that she died a few days later of the grief which my escape had occasioned her."

tells us, "reduced to pawn her jewels for the means of subsistence"—decided to accompany him and "throw herself at M. de Mazarin's feet." But her career at Rome, rumours of which had not failed to reach Paris, had been scarcely calculated to promote a reconciliation; and an attempt on the part of M. de Mazarin to have her arrested *en route*, in virtue of a decree which he had obtained from the Grande Chambre, was only frustrated by the arrival of a courier from the King ordering the enraged husband to sign a truce with his wife. His Majesty subsequently offered her the choice of two alternatives: either to return to the domestic roof, or liberty to reside in Rome, with a pension of twenty-four thousand livres, which he would order M. de Mazarin to pay her. An income of twenty-four thousand livres seemed a miserable pittance to a woman who had inherited so many millions; but even that seemed preferable to a *tête-à-tête* with the duke. Accordingly, she informed the King that she felt that it would be impossible for her to return to M. de Mazarin "after all the endeavours he had made to ruin her reputation," and at the beginning of the spring of 1671, set out for Italy.

The Duchesse de Mazarin's second sojourn at Rome lasted some twelve months. At the end of that time her sister Marie, whose relations with her husband, the Constable Colonna, were now so strained that she suspected him, not, it would seem, without a strong appearance of probability, of a design to have her poisoned, begged her to aid her to escape to France, where her old admirer Louis XIV. had offered her an asylum. The duchess consented, and in the last days

of May, 1672, the two ladies, taking advantage of the Constable's temporary absence from Rome, made their way to a spot on the coast near Civita Vecchia, where they hired a Neapolitan felucca, which, escaping by good fortune the galleys which the enraged Constable had sent in pursuit, landed them safely at Ciotat, in Provence.

From Ciotat the adventurous dames, whose arrival had created a great sensation, proceeded to Marseilles, and thence to Aix, where the Comtesse de Grignan, wife of the King's lieutenant in Provence, supplied some of the deficiencies in their wardrobe, and wrote to her mother, Madame de Sévigné, that "they were travelling like true heroines of romance with a great many jewels and no linen." After a stay of a few days, they left Aix, with the intention of proceeding to Paris, but, on reaching Pont-Saint-Esprit, they learned that a party of soldiers, sent by the Duc de Mazarin, were approaching to arrest the duchess, against whom the decree of the Grande Chambre already mentioned was still in force. This alarming intelligence caused Madame de Mazarin to part company with her sister, and that same night she took the road for Savoy, whose ruler, Charles Emmanuel II., had once been a suitor for her hand, and had treated her with so much courtesy when she passed through Turin, on her way to Italy the previous year, that she had resolved to take up her residence in his territories, if ever she quitted Rome.

Charles Emmanuel welcomed the fair fugitive in the most cordial manner, and installed her in the ducal château at Chambéry, where his generosity enabled her to maintain a semi-royal state, and to gather around her

a little Court, composed of the nobility and high officials of the province. The duke invited her to his hunting-parties, entertained her magnificently at his country-residence, and occasionally came to pay her homage at Chambéry. As for her husband, she troubled very little about him, except to apply to him for the payment of the pension of 24,000 livres, which Louis XIV. had promised her, and which seems to have been occasionally in arrears, since, in September, 1672, we find her writing to the King, begging him to command M. de Mazarin to disgorge without further delay, and "not to reduce her to the extremity of not knowing where to lay her head."

Needless to observe, Madame de Mazarin did not content herself with the admiration of the Duke of Savoy, and the most favoured of her adorers was the young historian César Vichard, who called himself the Abbé de Saint-Réal, although he had neither tonsure nor benefice.* Saint-Réal took up his residence at the château in the capacity of the duchess's reader, and "had the honour to converse with her every day and to read to her French and Italian books."

In the summer of 1675, Charles Emmanuel of Savoy died, and the widowed duchess, who had regarded her husband's attentions to the fair exile at Chambéry

* Saint-Réal, who was the author of *l'Usage de l'Histoire, Nouvelle historique de Don Carlos, la Conspiration de Venise*, and other works, was an erudite and charming writer; but under the influence of Varillas, then at the height of his reputation, he contracted the habit of "embellishing history and of seeking in the fecundity of his imagination resources against the sterility of events." It has been concluded a little too easily that he was the author of Madame de Mazarin's *Mémoires*, and they have been included in editions of his works. Most probably, he merely assisted in their compilation.

with the strongest disapproval, lost no time in intimating to that lady that she must look elsewhere for an asylum. Madame de Mazarin, accordingly, quitted Chambéry, travelled through Switzerland, Germany, and Holland, "on horseback, and wearing a plumed hat and a peruke," according to her former ally the Marquise de Courcelles, and reached Amsterdam, where she embarked for England.

It has been pretended that this journey had a political end, and that the leaders of the Country party had invited to England the woman whom rumour credited with being the most beautiful of her time, and who was well-known to be greatly irritated against the Court of France, in order to oppose her to the reigning siren. It would, however, appear more probable that the fact that the Duchess of York was her kinswoman and that she was, in consequence, sure of a welcome at Whitehall, had been her principal reason for choosing England.

Madame de Mazarin landed at Torbay and rode on horseback to London, "*en habit de cavalier*." Among her suite was the Abbé de Saint-Réal, who was still high in his patroness's favour. In London she was welcomed as a conqueror. "The Duke of York," writes Ruvigny to Pomponne, "received at his house yesterday the Duchesse de Mazarin, who received, at the same time, the compliments of the King of England through the Earl of Sunderland. Every one here is in expectation of some important change, and it is believed that a lady so extolled cannot fail to be the cause of adventures. M. de Gramont, who has undertaken the care of this lady's conduct, considers her as beautiful as ever. For myself,

who have not seen her since the first days of her marriage, and who have retained the recollection of what she was then like, I have observed some alteration, which, however, does not prevent her from being more beautiful than any one in England. . . . She has made her entrance into the Court of England like Armide into the camp of Godefroy. People talk of her everywhere, the men with admiration, the women with jealousy and uneasiness.”*

Nell Gwyn went into mourning, in ironical anticipation of the fall of the Duchess of Portsmouth; the enemies of that lady, private and political, made no secret of their joy at the advent of this triumphant beauty, who, though a subject herself of the Crown of France, was, they confidently hoped, destined to ruin French influence at Whitehall; the poet Waller celebrated the coming struggle for supremacy in some of his most finished verses; † and the Duchess of Cleveland followed in anticipation the advice which Saint-

* Despatch of January 6, 1676, cited by Forneron, *Louise de Kéroualle*.

† “ When through the world fair Mazarin had run,
Bright as her fellow-traveller, the sun,
Hither at length the Roman eagle flies,
As the last triumph of her conquering eyes,
As heir to Julius, she may pretend
A second time to make this nation bend ;
But Portsmouth, springing from the ancient race
Of Britons, which the Saxon here did chase,
As they great Cæsar did oppose, makes head,
And does against this new invader lead ;

• • • • •

Dressed to advantage, this illustrious pair
Arrived, for combat in the list appear.
What may the fates design ! for never yet
From distant regions two such beauties met.”

Evremond tendered the beauties of the Court in the funeral panegyric which he wrote upon his idol, and had the satisfaction of reading to her when she was in the best of health,* by retiring to Paris, whence it was presently reported that she was consoling herself for the loss of Charles II.'s affection by making a conquest of Harlay de Chanvallon, Archbishop of Paris.†

The Duchess of Portsmouth was under no misapprehension as to the danger which menaced her from so redoubtable a rival, and did not hesitate to solicit the assistance of the Court of France to defend their common interests. At the end of February, Ruvigny reported to Pomponne that "her jealousy permitted her so little rest that she was greatly changed;" and early in April she had a miscarriage which prostrated her for some time.

In the autumn she followed the Court to Newmarket; but there was a great contrast between the deference paid her on this occasion and in previous years. For, on arriving there, she found, to her mortification, that the King had omitted to find her a lodging, and she was obliged to hire a house in an adjoining village, which deprived her of the opportunity of seeing his Majesty as often as she would have

- * "Fair beauties of Whitehall, give way,
Hortensia does her charms display;
She comes, she comes! resign the day—
She must reign, and you obey."

† And it is quite probable that the report was well-founded, since the archbishop was at this stage of his career very far from being an example for his clergy to follow, and had tender relations with a certain Madame de Bretonvilliers, upon whom the wits of Paris bestowed the name of "*la Cathédrale*." For a further account of the amours of this prelate, see Bussy-Rabutin, vol. v. p. 39 and appendix, and *Revue rétrospective*, vol. i. p. 165.

wished. Her financial affairs were also in an unsatisfactory condition, her steward having pawned a considerable portion of her jewellery, which she had entrusted to his care, for over twelve thousand pounds, and made away with the money.

Money difficulties were also causing Madame de Mazarin anxiety, but with that lady, who had not as yet the King's purse to draw upon, they were much more serious. Sorely against her will—for she naturally desired at the beginning of her campaign against the reigning favourite to avoid all suspicion of being actuated by mercenary motives—she was obliged to inform Charles II. of her distress. But she was too astute to ask him for assistance, and merely requested him to use his good offices with Louis XIV. to obtain for her an increase of the pension which she was receiving from her husband. Charles readily consented, and wrote to Louis, asking him to persuade M. de Mazarin to increase the pension from twenty-four thousand to sixty thousand livres; and, at the same time, charged the French Ambassador to inform his master that “he would be very sensible of this favour, without which it would be impossible for the lady to exist.”

Louis XIV. found himself in a somewhat difficult position. He did not wish to disoblige Charles II., or to irritate a woman who might soon replace the Duchess of Portsmouth in that monarch's affections, by a refusal. But, on the other hand, he disliked interfering in family matters, and did not consider that he was justified in compelling one of his subjects, to whom he was under considerable financial

obligations, to disgorge a large sum of money in order to enable his wife to bring more discredit on his name than she had already done. He finally decided to write to Madame de Mazarin with his own hand to inform her that he judged it best not to intervene in the matter.

Ruvigny, who handed the letter to Madame de Mazarin, reported that she had shown "great displeasure at seeing herself abandoned in a Court where money was very necessary," adding that he had ascertained that Charles II. had secretly given her a thousand pounds, a present which he feared would have very troublesome consequences for the Duchess of Portsmouth, as it was not unlikely to pave the way for more intimate relations between the donor and the recipient. He was of opinion that it would be very impolitic to offend the lady, by a continued refusal to bring pressure to bear upon M. de Mazarin, as her importance was steadily increasing, and she had many influential friends at the English Court.

All the Court, indeed, appeared to be on the side of the new comer against Louise de K roualle, foremost among them being her young kinswoman, Mary of Modena, who had lately married the Duke of York, and with whom she had been staying at St. James's Palace since her arrival in England. Compelled to keep her bed on account of her pregnancy, nothing would content this princess but that Madame de Mazarin should be with her nearly the entire day, and, as the King happened to be very assiduous in his attentions to his sister-in-law and paid her long and

frequent visits, the beautiful Italian had abundant opportunities of ingratiating herself with his Majesty. Ruvigny acquits the Duchess of York of any intention of throwing the lady in the King's way, but declares that there are people who attach great significance to these constant meetings, and that there is a rumour that Madame de Mazarin is to be given a lodging at Whitehall.

The excellent Ruvigny found himself quite out of place in the midst of intrigues of this kind. He had accepted the post of Ambassador to England in the belief that he was to conduct political negotiations, and here he was required to combat the designs of a woman upon the inflammable heart of the Sovereign to whom he was accredited. It was a task altogether beyond his capacity. "Sire," he writes, "I have just ascertained that there is a certain and very secret understanding between the King of England and Madame de Mazarin. She is behaving so slyly that the persons who intended to meddle with this affair have no share in it." He urges the King to obtain an increase of Madame de Mazarin's pension from her husband. "Charles II. and his brother press me earnestly to make known to your Majesty the sentiments of affection and compassion that they have for the interests of the duchess, and have expressly ordered me to assure you, Sire, that you will give them a very sensible pleasure and one deserving of their gratitude if it pleases you to consider their intercession. They have been touched by the first refusal, and they hope that your Majesty will not refuse their second appeal." And he adds: "It seems to me that the



HONORÉ COURTIN

From an engraving dated 1668, after a painting by Nanteuil.

King of England takes the interests of this lady more to heart than he did at the beginning, and that with time he might very well conceive a passion for her."

Louis XIV. perceived that the old Calvinist, however competent to deal with ordinary diplomatic situations, was not the kind of man who could be trusted to checkmate feminine machinations, and he therefore sent to co-operate with him, and, at the end of some weeks, to replace him altogether, a very different kind of diplomatist, in the person of Honoré Courtin.

Honoré Courtin, Seigneur de Chanteraine, who arrived in London in May, 1676, was a former counsellor of the Parlement and intendant of Picardy, who had won his way into the favour and confidence of Louis XIV. by the possession of qualities not often found in conjunction. He was at once the most polished of courtiers and the most modest and disinterested of men, and combined with remarkable sagacity and shrewdness an unimpeachable honesty. In appearance, he was a very little man, whose wit, good-humour, and charming manners made him the most agreeable of companions, and who, Saint-Simon tells us, had been in his youth—he was now forty-eight—a great favourite with the ladies. Louis XIV. held him in the highest esteem, and occasionally honoured him by an invitation to Marly, the only "man of the robe" who enjoyed this highly-coveted privilege.

Courtin was no stranger to Whitehall, having spent some months in London on a diplomatic mission ten years earlier. However, a great deal of water had

flowed under London Bridge since then, and, before starting for England, he judged it advisable to gather as much information as possible about the present state of Charles II.'s Court. With this object, he paid a visit to a former maid-of-honour of Catherine of Braganza—he does not tell us her name—who, having had the misfortune to be concerned in an interesting domestic event within the precincts of the palace, had been dismissed from her post and had retired to Paris, where she was now residing as a *pensionnaire* in the Abbaye de Panthémont, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. From this lady he doubtless gleaned some very useful details about his Britannic Majesty's love-affairs, and, any way, he appears to have been much pleased with his informant, whom he describes, in a letter to Louvois, as “as good merchandise as I have seen for a long time,” adding that “if he had plenty of money and many affairs, as he (Louvois) had, she should not escape him.”

Courtin came to England bearing a proposal from the Duc de Mazarin to his wife that she should return to France and retire for a season into the Abbey of Montmartre; but the lady, who had had quite enough of convents, naturally preferred to remain where she was. The new Ambassador paid Madame de Mazarin several visits and observed her closely, and had more than one conversation with the Abbé de Saint-Réal, with the result that he arrived at the same conclusion as his predecessor had done, namely, that it would be distinctly advisable for Louis XIV. to compel her husband to accede to her demands, as she was

under the impression that his Majesty was prejudiced against her, "so that it is to be feared, if she obtains any influence here, that she will not employ it as your Majesty might desire." *

That Madame de Mazarin would obtain this influence appeared only too probable. Courtin did not hesitate to interrogate Charles II. on this very delicate subject, and that monarch, without apparently being the least offended or embarrassed by such a question, replied that "he had much affection for her, but that he should not allow himself to be won over by the cabals which were being formed to entangle him with her." The Ambassador, however, was frankly sceptical about his Majesty's powers of resistance. The lady was so beautiful, he told Louis XIV.; the King conversed with her more willingly than with any one; every one about his person was continually chanting her praises; while, on the other hand, the Duchess of Portsmouth had hardly a friend in the whole Court, and was, moreover, in bad health, and, in consequence, had for the time being lost her good looks. And, if Charles were to yield to temptation and to substitute the Italian for the Frenchwoman as his chief sultana, the consequences, from a political point of view, might be most serious for France. Danby, as they very well knew, although he had allowed himself to be drawn by Louise de K roualle, and by the secret negotiations with France, in which Charles II. had taken care to compromise him, into the French party, and had reluctantly consented to the prorogation of Parliament for fifteen months, which Louis XIV. had

* Courtin to Louis XIV.,¹ June 8, 1676, in *Forneron*.

procured from the King of England, in return for a present of two and a half million livres (February 16, 1676), was in reality anxious to counteract French aggrandizement and to secure for England an influential place in the councils of Europe. With the Duchess of Portsmouth replaced by a woman, incensed against the Court of France by the scant consideration which she had received at its hands, the principal obstacle to Danby's adopting an anti-French policy would be removed, and they might have to combat at the same time the Minister and the mistress.

"It matters very little to your Majesty," writes Courtin, "that the Duchesse de Mazarin does not live with her husband and that she receives fifty thousand livres from him for her expenses; but it matters much to you, in the present conjunction, that England does not join your enemies. England hates us more and more; yesterday the people wanted to throw the resident of Venice into the river, under the impression that he was a Frenchman. We must withdraw from here, at any cost, a woman whom we have so much cause to fear, both on account of her beauty and her resentment. . . . It will be a miracle if the King of England does not allow himself to be captured; he is besieged from all sides."

CHAPTER XIII

TRIUMPH OF MADAME DE MAZARIN

FULLY alive as he was to the danger of the situation, Courtin was resolved to leave no means untried to avert the threatened surrender of Charles II. to the charms of Madame de Mazarin. He began by writing to that lady's husband and sought to inflame his jealousy. He pointed out that his wife was far too agreeably lodged at St. James's Palace to have any inclination to exchange her luxurious apartments there for the rigour of the cloister, but suggested that, although, in the present state of things, "she would not promise to allow him to enjoy the liberties which marriage authorised," the offer of a pension of fifty thousand livres, together with the restoration of her jewels and furniture, might induce her to return to the Palais-Mazarin. "She is resolved," he adds, "not to establish herself at Whitehall, that is to say, in the King's palace; but when she is in need of anything, I assure you, Monsieur, she will find here people who will assist her willingly."

This epistle, however, did not have the result which the writer had anticipated; and the duke replied in

an unctuous letter eight pages in length, in which he detailed all the reasons which ought to persuade his errant consort that the seclusion of a convent was the most suitable residence for her. Failing in this quarter, the Ambassador set to work upon the Abbé de Saint-Réal, who gave promise of being more manageable, since it was apparent to every one that he was the victim of a devouring jealousy. "He had always, in the house, the air of an unhappy lover, remaining all alone in a corner of the fireplace in the room next the cabinet in which cards were being played, and speaking to no one." Courtin represented to him that, if he desired to retain Madame de Mazarin's waning affections, the only course open to him was to persuade her to leave a city where she was surrounded by so many temptations; and this the abbé promised to do. However, in the middle of October, to the great mortification of Courtin, Saint-Réal, without giving him any warning of his intention, suddenly took his departure from England. "I believe," writes the Ambassador, in reply to Louvois's inquiries, "that vexation at seeing Madame de Mazarin always surrounded by people who prevented him from conversing with her as comfortably as he did at Chambéry caused him to take a violent resolution, of which I am sure that he repented many times before reaching Dover. Madame de Mazarin has sustained his departure with the fortitude of a Roman matron, and, to speak of things as they are, I am greatly deceived if she is not very pleased at being delivered from him."

At the end of May, 1676, the Duchess of Portsmouth left London for Bath, where she remained until the

beginning of July. On her return journey, she stopped at Windsor, where the Court then was, to dine with Charles, but, not being offered accommodation in the Castle, was obliged to go on to London to sleep. "I intend to arm myself from head to foot," observed Nell Gywn, on hearing of the return of her rival, "to protect myself against the resentment which the frequent visits the King has paid me during her absence must have caused her." Courtin reported that the duchess had benefited by her visit to Bath, though she was still a little thin. However, she hoped that rest would soon enable her "to re-establish her embonpoint."

A few days later, the King having returned from Windsor, the duchess gave a grand dinner-party in honour of the French Ambassador. The musicians of the Chamber of Louis XIV., who were then touring in England, played during the meal, and Charles II. came to listen to them. Louise requested the musicians to play the air: *Mate me con mirar, mas no me mate con zelos* ("Make me die of grief, but not of jealousy"), at which there was a little laughter in which his Majesty joined. The King in public paid the favourite every possible attention, but he never visited her apartments alone, and it was the general belief that their relations had ceased to be on a tender footing. To add to her troubles, the Duchess of Portsmouth had the misfortune to injure one of her eyes, which was black and swollen for several days, upon which the wits declared that she wished to transform herself from a blonde into a brunette and have black eyes like Madame de Mazarin.

Matters were looking serious for the Duchess of Portsmouth. After a reign of six years, it seemed as though her fall was close at hand. She herself, bravely as she continued the struggle, felt that she was being worsted, and during a visit which Courtin paid her gave way for a moment to despair.

"I witnessed yesterday evening," writes the Ambassador to Louvois under date August 6, "an incident which aroused in me the greatest pity imaginable, and which would perhaps have touched you, all wise and virtuous though you are. I went to Madame de Portsmouth's apartments. She opened her heart to me, in the presence of two of her waiting-maids, of whom you perhaps know one, named Ballex, who was formerly in the service of the Comtesse du Plessis. These two maids remained glued against the wall, with downcast eyes. The mistress shed a torrent of tears; and her sighs and sobs interrupted her words. In short, never has a spectacle appeared to me more sad or more touching. I remained with her until midnight, and I neglected nothing to restore her courage and to make her understand how much it was to her interest to dissemble her grief."

"The scene of the *signora adobranda*," replies Louvois, "has rather diverted his Majesty. I am sure that she has very much entertained you first." But what afforded Louis XIV. and his Minister material for cynical amusement was, nevertheless, politically a very serious matter. The fall of Louise de Kéroualle would undoubtedly be regarded by foreign Courts as a proof of the weakening of French influence over Charles II.; and this might very well

have a most disastrous effect upon the negotiations then in progress at Nimwegen and prevent the Dutch from severing themselves from their allies and concluding a separate peace with France, which was the main object of Louis XIV.'s diplomacy at that moment. It was above all things necessary, therefore, to persuade the Continental Powers that the Duchess of Portsmouth was still in a position to support the policy of France ; and the French plenipotentiaries at the Congress were instructed that both the health and the credit of the lady with Charles II. remained unimpaired. "The Duchess of Portsmouth," wrote Courtin, "has returned from the waters in better health than when she left to visit them ; the King went to meet her, which shows that he still retains the same sentiments towards her."

But while the Ambassador was sending these comforting assurances to Nimwegen, his despatches to Versailles contained the most disquieting information as to the progress which Madame de Mazarin was making in the good graces of Charles II.

The little Countess of Sussex, the elder of the King's daughters by the Duchess of Cleveland, had formed a great attachment for the beautiful and romantic Italian, who had won her affections by entering heart and soul into her childish amusements, and, as her playmate, became necessarily a constant visitor to her apartments. This intimacy, though not at all to the taste of the Earl of Sussex, was encouraged by Charles, for, on the departure of the Duchess of Cleveland for France, her daughter had been installed in the apartments at Whitehall which that lady had

occupied at the height of her favour ; and, as these were situated immediately above those of the King, with which they were connected by means of a private staircase, his Majesty was able to visit them as often as he pleased without being observed. However, if the King's visits passed unperceived, those of Madame de Mazarin did not, and from their length and frequency people did not fail to draw their own conclusions. "Madame de Mazarin is there at all hours," writes Courtin towards the end of July ; "she even passed last night there." And he adds maliciously : "I have ascertained that Madame de Mazarin is very satisfied with the conversation which she had with the King."

Since there could now be no longer any room for doubt as to the nature of Charles's relations with that lady, Courtin deemed it politic to pay Madame de Mazarin the most assiduous attentions, in the hope that, by ingratiating himself with her, he might bring her to regard the Court of France with more kindly feelings and thus minimize the danger of the influence which she might acquire over the King's mind. He, accordingly, became one of the most devoted of her courtiers, and not a day seems to have passed without him paying her a visit. He spent so much time in her apartments, in fact, and wrote of her to Versailles in such enthusiastic terms ("If you had seen her dancing the '*furlone*' to the guitar, you could not have prevented yourself from altogether espousing her cause"), that Louvois appears to have had some suspicion that he was falling under the siren's spell. The Ambassador hastened to exculpate himself from such an accusation,

and assured the Minister that, notwithstanding their daily intercourse, she had not yet succeeded in turning his head, although "the poor Ambassador of Portugal was dying for love of her." At the same time, he expresses his opinion that, notwithstanding the amiability which Madame de Mazarin showed towards himself, he was certain that she was embittered against France, by the refusal of Louis XIV. to secure for her the increase of her pension which Charles II. had demanded, and that it would be most advisable to satisfy her in this matter.

Writing three days later (November 2, 1676), Courtin states that Charles II. still continues to pay frequent visits to Louise de Kéroualle's apartments, though only at such times as the lady was in the habit of receiving other visitors; and that he believed that he might truthfully say that his Majesty passed the night more frequently with Nell Gwyn than with her. Indeed, if the best informed of the courtiers were to be believed, he was "content to live very virtuously with Madame de Portsmouth." "As for what concerns Madame de Mazarin," he continues, "I know that he [the King] considers her the most beautiful woman that he has ever beheld. Although I visit her every day, I perceive that she conceals from me as much as possible, and I am the most deceived person in the world if she is not engaged in some political intrigue here."

The Ambassador, it may be mentioned, great as was his admiration for Madame de Mazarin, appears to have been of opinion that she must yield the palm for beauty to an English lady. "I am going to see

Madame Middleton,"* he writes to Louvois, "who is the most beautiful woman in England and the most amiable. I should give her all your money,† if she were willing to listen to me, but she once refused a purse of fifteen hundred pounds which M. de Gramont offered her.‡ So have no fear for your treasure. . . ." And in another letter: "As regards Madame Middleton, I have never seen a woman in any foreign country who has appeared to me more amiable. She is very beautiful; she has an air of the best breeding about her; it would be impossible to have more intelligence than she has; and her demeanour is modest and unassuming. In a word, Monsieur, if I were your age, I believe that I should not be able to prevent myself from falling madly in love. But I shall soon be forty-nine, and I am beginning to be very much inconvenienced by the thickness of the London air. . . . Madame Middleton, to whom I said that you desired to have her portrait, testified to me that she was very much beholden to

* Jane Myddelton or Middleton (1645-1692), daughter of Sir Robert Needham and wife of Charles Myddelton, of Ruabon. Pepys describes, in 1665, as "that famous and incomparable beauty," and she seems to have been generally acknowledged as the most lovely woman at Charles II.'s Court. Her portraits depict her as a blonde beauty of the languorous type, with a voluptuous figure, full lips, auburn hair, and dark hazel eyes. She is believed to have numbered among her lovers, or *soupirants*, the King, the Duke of York, Ralph Montagu, Lawrence Hyde, Clarendon's second son, Gramont, and Edmund Waller, the poet.

† The fund established in England by Louis XIV., after the Marquis de Sessac's mission to Versailles, for the corruption of members of Parliament.

‡ He had previously despatched other gifts, accompanied by ardent declarations of love, but both went astray in transmission, being intercepted by Mrs. Myddelton's maid.

you. Thus, Monsieur, you see that you stand very well with her who is the most beautiful in England. It only remains to you to be the same with her who is the most amiable in France, and I counsel you not to lose the opportunity of profiting by it."

Charles II. and Madame de Mazarin continued their secret interviews in the apartments of the little Countess of Sussex until the end of that year, when, to their intense chagrin, they found themselves no longer able to make use of this most convenient rendezvous. Lord Sussex, who, although very young, was, according to Courtin, "*de fort méchante humeur*," had, as we have mentioned, viewed his wife's friendship with a lady who had rendered herself so unpleasantly notorious with a far from friendly eye, and, towards the end of November, encouraged by his mother-in-law, the Duchess of Cleveland, and by Louise de Kéroualle, "who entertains a mortal hatred for Madame de Sussex, because she believes that she is conducting the intrigue between the King and Madame de Mazarin,"* announced his intention of carrying off his wife into the country. "They say," writes Lady Chaworth, "her husband and she will part unless she leave the Court and be content to live with him in the country, he disliking her much converse with Madame Mazarin and the addresses she gets in that company. . . ." Courtin opined that the King "would not suffer Madame de Mazarin to be left without a companion," and perhaps Lord Sussex might have yielded to his Majesty's persuasions, had

* Courtin to Louvois, November 29, 1676.

the little countess and her friend conducted themselves with more discretion. But they had been learning to fence, and one dull December morning took it into their heads to show the town what proficiency they had acquired in that art. Accordingly, "they went downe into St. James's Parke, with drawne swords under their night gowned (*i.e.*, dressing-gowns), which they drew out and made several fine passes, much to the admiration of severall men that was lookers-on in the Parke."

This escapade exhausted Lord Sussex's patience, and a few days later he carried off his wife to Hurstmonceaux Castle, his seat in Sussex, where the young countess had to derive what consolation she could for her separation from Madame de Mazarin by kissing a miniature of that lady which she had brought with her.

During the last weeks of 1676, the favour of the Duchess of Portsmouth continued to decline, although, to spare her feelings, or rather to spare himself her tears and reproaches, Charles appears to have been at great pains to conceal from her and from every one his meetings with his new enchantress. Thus, Courtin reported that, though very frequently after retiring to rest, the King rose again, dressed, and left his apartments, and did not return to them until five o'clock in the morning, no one seemed to know for certain where he spent the interval, although "the best-informed courtiers do not believe that he passes his nights with Madame de Portsmouth. He pays her every attention during the day; but he reserves to himself the liberty of passing the night with whom he pleases."



THE DUKE OF ST. ALBANS

From a picture in the collection of Lord de L'Isle and Dudley

But, if Charles were anxious to spare the feelings of his mistress *en titre*, Nell Gwyn was not so considerate, and she indulged in biting witticisms at the expense of her discomfited rival, which seldom failed to reach the latter's ears. The advent of the all-conquering Italian had made no difference to Nell's position; indeed, she was, if anything, in higher favour than ever, and at the end of 1676 had the satisfaction of seeing her eldest son by the King not only acknowledged by his royal father, but raised to the peerage. The way in which she obtained these advantages for the boy was certainly characteristic of her.

The recent favours bestowed upon the sons of the Duchesses of Cleveland and Portsmouth had occasioned her no little dissatisfaction, and one day when Charles came to visit her, he found her in a decidedly snappish mood. Presently, she sent for her eldest boy and, as soon as he appeared, exclaimed: "Come hither, you little bastard!" The King remonstrated. "I have no better name to call him by," was the retort. "Then I must give him one," said the King, laughing; and on December 27, 1676, Charles Beauclerk was duly acknowledged as his Majesty's son and created Baron Headington and Earl of Burford. "Never was a peerage sought in so witty and abrupt a manner," observes Cunningham, "and never was a plea for one so immediately admitted." Nor was this all that was done, for shortly afterwards the little Earl of Burford was betrothed to Lady Diana Vere, the only child of Aubrey de Vere, the twentieth and last Earl of Oxford. The ex-orange-girl was not spared to witness her son's marriage to the last survivor of that illustrious

family, but she lived long enough to see Diana Vere in the infancy of those charms which were to make her, as Duchess of St. Albans,* one of the most conspicuous beauties whom Kneller painted, and to cause Lord Halifax to write "for the toasting-glasses of the ' Kit-Cat Club '":

The line of Vere so long renowned in arms
Concludes with lustre in St. Albans' charms,
Her conquering eyes have made their race compleat.
They rose in valour and in beauty set.

Imitated from Waller ("On St. James's Park"):

Making the circle of their reign complete
Those suns of empire, where they rise they set.

Courtin describes an amusing scene when "the actress whom they call Miss Nelly" came to visit the Duchesse de Mazarin, in order to thank her for her congratulation on the recognition of Charles Beauclerk and his elevation to the peerage. The Duchess of Portsmouth had also come to visit Madame de Mazarin, "which did not happen very often," as had Lady Harvey,† a firm ally of the new favourite and a

* Charles Beauclerk, Earl of Burford, was created Duke of St. Albans in 1684.

† Eleanor Montagu, daughter of Edward Montagu, second Baron Montagu, of Boughton, and sister of Ralph Montagu, English Ambassador in France. She was a woman of considerable attainments, and La Fontaine wrote of her in the fable of *le Renard anglais*:

Le bon cœur est chez vous compagnon du bon sens,
Avec cent qualités trop longues à deduire,
Une noblesse d'âme, un talent pour conduire
Et les affaires et les gens,
Une humeur fraîche et libre et le don d'être amie
Malgré Jupiter même et les temps orageux.

If, however, we are to believe the gossip of her contemporaries, she was addicted to the most revolting of vices, and her enmity against the Duchess of Portsmouth and her intimacy with Madame de Mazarin were due to the same cause.

sworn enemy of the old. "Everything passed off quite gaily, and with many civilities from one to the other; but I do not suppose that in all England it would be possible to get together three women more obnoxious to one another." When the Duchess of Portsmouth had taken her departure, the irrepressible Nell, "who was in a very sprightly humour," began to banter the Ambassador, and asked him before every one to persuade Louis XIV. to make her a handsome present, "telling me that she well deserved it and that she was of much more service to the King of England than was Madame de Portsmouth, and making me understand and all the company that he passed the night more often with her." After which, at the request of the other ladies, who had heard much of the fineness of the actress's underclothing and wanted to see for themselves if report had spoken truly, the young lady "lifted up all her petticoats, one after the other; and never have I seen anything so neat or more magnificent."*

At the beginning of February, 1677, to the astonishment of Court and town a formal reconciliation was effected between the Duchess of Portsmouth and Madame de Mazarin, who had hitherto treated one another with the most frigid courtesy, and had declined to meet at the same table. It took place at a supper-party at the French Embassy and was due in some degree to the address of Courtin, who, in view of the approaching meeting of Parliament and the bitter hostility of the Commons to France, had recognized that the union of all the favourites was imperative,

* Courtin to Pomponne, January 18, 1677.

if the indolent monarch were to be kept in a combative mood.

One evening at the Opera, Lady Harvey and Mrs. Myddelton, happening to meet the Ambassador, invited themselves to sup with him on the morrow, and each asked permission to bring one of her friends. Lady Harvey arrived with Madame de Mazarin, and Mrs. Myddelton with the Duchess of Portsmouth, who brought with her Lady Beauclerk, whom Courtin describes as "after Madame Myddelton the most beautiful woman in England, and formerly an intimate friend of Lady Harvey, but now at daggers drawn with her." It was certainly an oddly-assorted supper-party; but fortunately none of the ladies was destitute of a sense of humour, and they proceeded to enjoy themselves. Supper over, his Excellency, who was not the man to squander his providences, playfully locked up together in couples in the same rooms the ladies whom he deemed the most violently antagonistic; and when he released the two duchesses from this species of imprisonment, he had the satisfaction of seeing them "emerge hand-in-hand and come skipping and dancing down the stairs."

And so, for a time at least, peace reigned in the camp of the concubines.

This apparent reconciliation was the proof of the triumph of Madame de Mazarin; and just as the long-suffering Queen had formerly resigned herself to the ascendancy of the Duchess of Cleveland, so the haughty young Frenchwoman, already obliged to tolerate Nell Gwyn and the mistresses of the gutter,

resigned herself to the reign of the Italian. And having schooled herself to accept what she could not prevent, Louise de K roualle actually carried her complaisance to the length of inviting her rival to dinner and afterwards taking both her and Lady Harvey to the Mall in her carriage.

From that moment, no one could any longer entertain any doubt that the new love had, temporarily at any rate, supplanted the old, or if there were any such, their doubts must soon have been removed by the splendour with which Madame de Mazarin proceeded to surround herself. "She has had a livery made," writes Courtin to Louvois, "more magnificent than any with which you are acquainted; the lace costs three livres, fifteen sols the French ell, and the coats are quite hidden by it. There are nine of them, with which to array two porters, six lackeys and a page; and they cost, with the cravats, 2,600 livres. She keeps an excellent table. In a word, her expenditure far exceeds the two thousand crowns which she receives from her husband. . . . She has grown handsomer, she is stouter, and her beauty has reached the highest point of its perfection. . . . With the appetite which God has given her, she would certainly devour double the income that she has, and if her husband were aware of how excellent is her health, he would make no difficulty about increasing her pension. I do not know how she does it, but these extraordinary expenses appear to me a little suspicious. . . ." In another letter, the Ambassador declares that the duchess "is on as good terms with the King as it is possible for a beautiful lady to be,"

and expresses his surprise that, at a time when it was of such supreme importance to the Court of France to possess the goodwill of Charles II., it should not have been considered necessary to secure that of his mistress. Finally, on March 4, Courtin reports that Madame de Mazarin has been shut up with the King from three o'clock in the afternoon until seven, in a room adjacent to the royal apartments, to which only his Majesty and a confidential *valet de chambre** possessed keys.

* Presumably, William Chiffinch, Keeper of the Closet to the King, "who, above all his predecessors, carried the abuse of back-stairs influence to scientific perfection."

CHAPTER XIV

CHARLES, LOUIS AND THE PARLIAMENT

AND so Charles II. had the satisfaction of adding perhaps the most beautiful woman in Europe to his seraglio ; but it was a satisfaction which he would have done wisely to deny himself, for, thanks in a great measure to the enormous sums lavished on " the ladies in service " and those on the retired list, his Majesty's financial position was growing desperate. He appealed to his paymaster at Versailles for assistance, but Louis was not in a condition to give more than he had bargained for. In the campaign of the previous year, the French had captured Condé, Bouchain and Aire, forced William of Orange to raise the siege of Maestricht, and almost annihilated the fleets of Spain and Holland. But these successes had been dearly bought. France was exhausted and seething with discontent ; the enormous expenditure which the war was entailing had caused oppressive taxation—leading to revolts in Normandy, Brittany and Guienne—the sale of offices and, finally, to great loans, which had to be raised at ten per cent. interest. It was only, indeed, with difficulty that Louis was able to pay to Charles

his quarterly "salary"; but this he did regularly, receiving in exchange the following holograph form of receipt :

"J'ay reçu du Roy Très Chrestien, par les mains de M. Courtin, la somme de cent mille escus, monnoie de France, pour le second quartier qui est escheu le dernier jour de juin, en deduction de quatre cens mille escus payable à la fin de l'année. Fuit à Whitehall, le 25^e Septembre, 1676. Charles—R."

But these supplies were quite insufficient for Charles's needs, and so low had the credit of the Crown sunk that it was impossible to raise a loan in London. He had therefore no alternative but to allow Parliament to meet on the date originally fixed (February 25, 1677).

Louis could not prevent Parliament from assembling, but he could afford a considerable sum for bribing members of both Houses. The Earl of Berkshire, who two years before had extracted from the French Government the sum of one thousand jacobus to compensate him for the pension from Spain which he declared his zeal for the interests of the Most Christian King had cost him, consented, in consideration of the promise of a similar sum, part of which he insisted on Courtin paying down, to create a French party in the Lords; Coleman, the Duke of York's secretary, was won over by the same means, and Lauderdale, though personally inaccessible to bribery, was secured through his rapacious wife. All due economy was exercised in this very dirty business,

and often Courtin appears to have considered it sufficient to distribute "presents of champagne and other wines" to command a vote. "You would not believe," he writes to Pomponne, "how much five or six dozen bottles of wine sent at a suitable moment can serve to calm their minds. For, on leaving the Parliament, they go to dine with one another, and that is the time when cabals are formed." The Ambassador, however, was required to exercise great discretion in his selection of these venal legislators, since there were a great many who would not scruple to accept the money of the King of France without any intention of rendering his Majesty the services expected of them in return. Altogether, Courtin, who was an honourable man, seems to have been not a little ashamed of the part which he was being called upon to play; but his scruples did not please Louis XIV. and his Ministers. To their minds, all means were justifiable if only they could make themselves masters of the Netherlands.

At the opening of the new session a blunder on the part of a section of the Opposition gave the Government a marked advantage, and enabled Danby to get rid of his most powerful foes for a season. Shaftesbury and his friends asserted the illegality of proroguing Parliament for more than a year, and circulated pamphlets wherein it was argued that this illegality had *ipso facto* dissolved the Parliament. A motion brought forward by them to this effect having been rejected, another, proposing that Shaftesbury, Buckingham, Salisbury and Wharton should be called to account for their action, was carried by the Court.

Ordered to acknowledge their error and to ask pardon at the Bar of the House, they refused to do so, and were thereupon brought to the Bar as delinquents, and committed to the Tower during the King's pleasure.

But this success was of short duration, for the campaign of 1677 had begun unusually early, and soon came the tidings of the fall of Valenciennes and Cambrai; the defeat of the Prince of Orange at Cassel, and the capitulation of Saint-Omer. The news of Louis's fresh triumphs aroused a fresh outburst of hostility to France. Addresses to the King, praying him to recall the English troops serving in the French army, were passed in both Houses; and twice the Commons urged him to declare war against France, with offers of unlimited support. "The English," writes Courtin, "are ready to sell the shirts off their backs to save the Netherlands. These are the very words they make use of. The clamour could not be louder. We are fattening on their curses."

The temper of the Commons rose as the fortunes of William of Orange and his allies declined, until, presuming on the concession of principle which Charles had made by laying before them the *Traité simulé*, though in so doing he had grossly deceived them, they informed him that they would give no money for alliances which had not been submitted to them for discussion. This demand was an altogether new departure, and one of a most important kind, implying, indeed, a violation of the Constitution, as it had been understood for centuries, far more serious than the King's abuse of his dispensing power, which had been

so bitterly resented. For the right of entering into foreign alliances, and of deciding upon peace and war, were the choicest flowers of the royal prerogative, and for Charles to have given way would have been to confess himself utterly worsted in his struggle with the Parliament.*

In angry and contemptuous terms the King rejected the demand, and bade the Commons mind their own business. "You do not content yourselves," said he, "with desiring me to enter into secret leagues as may be for the safety of my kingdom; but you tell me what sort of leagues they must be, and with whom. Should I suffer this fundamental power of making peace and war to be invaded (though but once), as to have the manner and circumstance of leagues prescribed to me by Parliament, it's plain that no Prince or State would any longer believe that the Sovereignty of England resided in the Crown; nor could I think myself to signify any more to foreign princes than the empty sound of a king. Wherefore, you may rest assured that no condition shall make me depart from or lessen so essential a part of the Monarchy." Then, as though to emphasize the little account he took of his listeners, he directed them to adjourn—not to adjourn themselves; and, though several members rose to protest, the Speaker, without any question put, declared the House adjourned, and left the chair. Next day the King caused his speech to be printed in the news-sheets; while the transactions of the House were not allowed to be printed or even distributed in a written form.

* Mr. Osmond Airy, "Charles II."

"Thus," writes Andrew Marvell, in the bitterness of his heart, "were they well rewarded for their itch of perpetual sitting and of acting, the Parliament being grown to that height of contempt as to be gazetted among runaway servants, lost dogs, strayed horses and highway robbers."

Charles had spoken boldly to the House, and he followed up his bold words by even bolder actions. Each time that the attitude of the Commons became too threatening, he replied by promptly adjourning them: from May to July, from July to December, and from December to April, 1678, though, for reasons which will presently be related, they were, in fact, summoned to meet in January.

But this sort of proceeding could not go on indefinitely, and while the Commons were thus being contemptuously kicked from adjournment to adjournment, "as from one stair down to another," Courtin was writing to Louvois, in answer to a despatch of the Minister informing him of the continued success of the French arms: "Continue; conquer as much as you can this year, for next year it will be impossible for the King of England, unless he choose to ruin himself entirely, to avoid entering the league against us."

To those familiar with Charles's methods, it was, of course, perfectly clear that he had succeeded in obtaining elsewhere the funds which Parliament had refused him; and, indeed, all through the spring and summer his Majesty had been drawing considerable sums at the French Embassy, in return for each successive adjournment, that from December to April

being purchased at the price of 2,000,000 livres, after haggling worthy of a couple of Jew peddlers. Charles was thus enabled to defray the ordinary expenses of government, and satisfy, to some extent at least, the demands of the seraglio; while Louis gained the prospect of a few months more freedom from English intervention.

It was not, however, Courtin who negotiated these interesting financial transactions, but Barrillon, who had arrived in London at the beginning of May, 1677. Louis XIV. had recognized the necessity of having a less scrupulous Ambassador in England, and when Courtin complained that the climate of London was having an injurious effect upon his health,* and his prolonged residence at so expensive a Court as Whitehall a still more injurious effect upon his fortune, he promptly took him at his word. On learning, however, that Barrillon had been appointed to succeed him, he appears to have regretted his complaints, and, in a letter to Louvois, endeavoured to show that the influence of the Court ladies, with whom he was so great a favourite, was of more importance than that of money. In this letter, he informs the Minister that the Duchess of Portsmouth had benefited greatly by her visit to Bath, and that, though the King had "left her for some time in repose," yet, if she continued in good health, she had so beautiful a complexion that "he could not believe that he could be continually near her without desiring her."

* In one of his despatches to Pomponne, he declares that he owed his life to the advice of Charles, who had recommended him to wear Welsh flannel next his skin, and that there was "nothing so warm or so healthy."

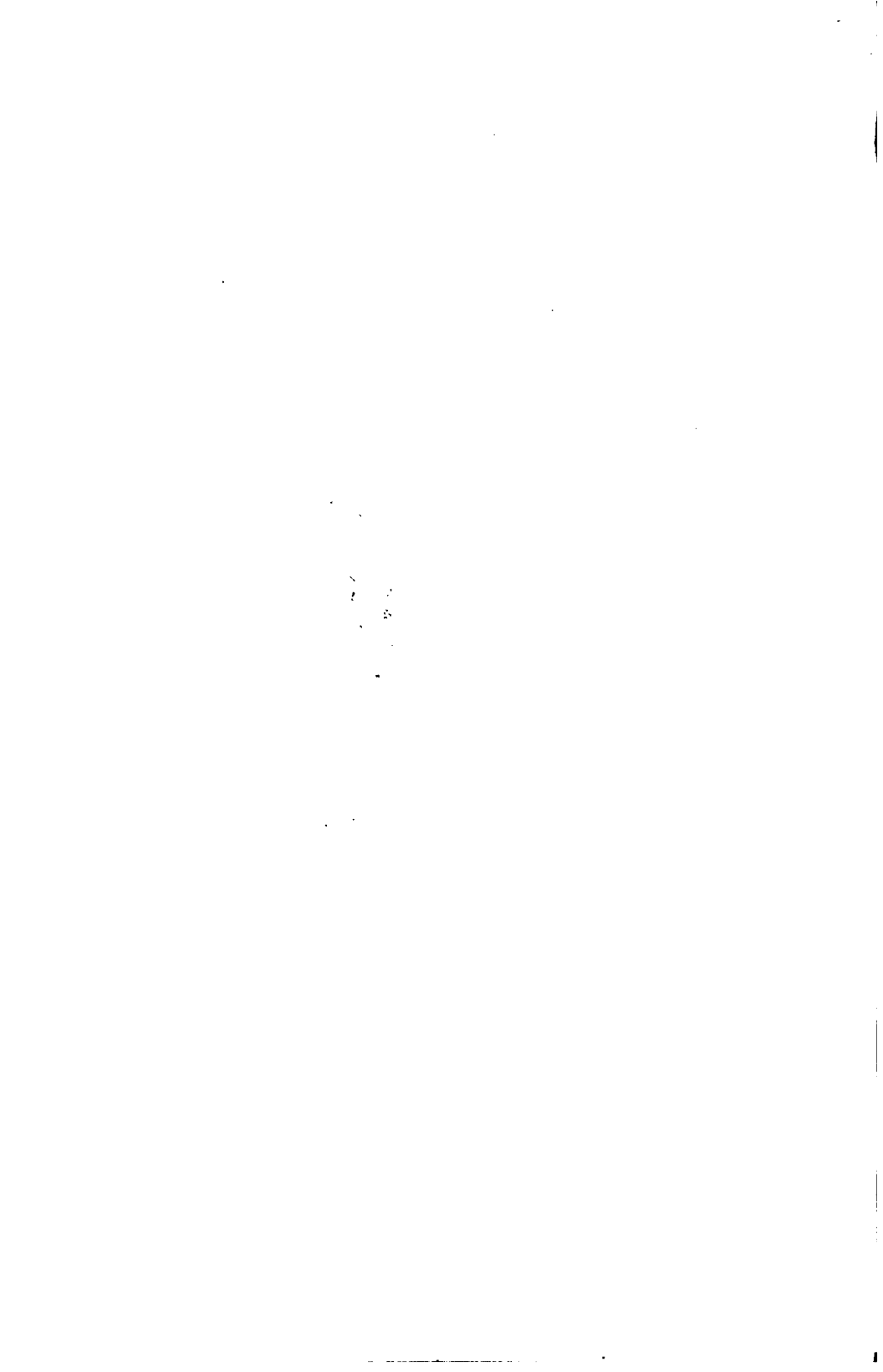
But the French Government, though it was far from underrating the part played by women in English politics, or the address which Courtin had shown in dealing with them, was of opinion that the time had arrived when the continued neutrality of England could only be secured by gold—by profuse and unscrupulous bribery—and that the man required for this business was one more skilled in recruiting traitors than in composing differences between sultanas. And so Courtin had to give way to Barrillon, and in September he returned to France, though not before he had taken care to place his successor on the best of terms with the Duchess of Portsmouth. “I am persuaded,” he writes to Pomponne, in asking for an abbey for a certain Madame de Tymeur, an aunt of the duchess—a piece of preferment which, in his opinion, could not fail to dispose the latter favourably towards the new Ambassador—“that, if you viewed matters from so close at hand as we do, you would consider that it is important for an Ambassador of France to have the liberty of access to Madame de Portsmouth at all hours of the day.”

Barrillon, like Courtin, belonged to a family of the magistracy, being a son of the celebrated Président Barrillon, who had been punished for his resistance to Richelieu by imprisonment at Pinerolo, where he died in 1645. With manners as polished as those of his predecessor at the French Embassy, and almost equally skilful in divining and thwarting feminine manoeuvres, he was an infinitely shrewder judge of men, and was a master of the art of corrupting them, and of hiding



JEAN JACQUES BARRILLON

From a contemporary print.



his contempt for those who yielded to his persuasions. "He pays them with a smiling face; he sees them die without remorse," observes M. Forneron, who compares him to "those Ambassadors of Philip II. of Spain who threw the doubloons to the Catholic conspirators, simulated an interest in the democracy of the League, and then, the game being lost, heaped up a new stake." For the rest, he was an agreeable companion and a good friend. When in Paris, he was nearly always to be found at the house of Madame de Sévigné, to whom he once observed: "Those who love you more than I do, love you too much." He was also on intimate terms with La Fontaine, and a great admirer of his work; and on the occasion of Barrillon being sent to England, the poet addressed to him some charming verses.

Barrillon's first dealings with Charles were scarcely calculated to give him a very favourable impression of his Britannic Majesty's sense of honour, for the King declared that when he had agreed to accept 2,000,000 livres from Louis, he had, of course, understood £200,000, which, at the current rate of exchange, meant a considerable difference in his favour. When the Ambassador began to remonstrate, he interrupted him, begging him "in God's name not to speak of the affair, as he could not bear to hear it spoken of," but to go and arrange the matter with Danby. Then, conducting Barrillon to the door of his cabinet, he opened it himself, and said: "I am so ashamed that I cannot speak any more to you. Go, see the Treasurer, for he has made known to me such large wants that I cannot believe that the King my brother will leave me in this embarrassment." After such a piteous

appeal, further resistance was, of course, out of the question.

But a much more serious mortification than that of being jockeyed out of a few thousand livres was in store for him, for within a few weeks of pocketing this last bribe, he was to see Charles take a step which practically, if not verbally, cut right athwart his engagements to Louis XIV.

In September, 1677, William of Orange, that sickly but indomitable prince, who, through disappointment and defeat, with jealous States and suspicious Parliaments, with raw levies and scant supplies, was out of his marvellous and heroic tenacity gradually to create such a resistance to the ambitious schemes of Louis as turned the whole current of the world's history, arrived in England, ostensibly on a merely friendly visit to his uncles, King Charles and the Duke of York, and proceeded to Newmarket, where the brothers were staying for the autumn race-meeting. As usual, nothing was talked of there but the merits of dogs and horses and fighting-cocks, although both William's errand and the answer he was to receive were so perfectly understood that he wrote to the States-General to announce the step he was about to take. It was not until his return with the Court to Whitehall towards the end of October that he formally asked for the hand of James's eldest daughter, the Princess Mary, and received a favourable answer. In order to give Louis XIV. no time for remonstrance, the affair was marked by the greatest haste and secrecy, and Barrillon was not informed by Charles that the marriage had been decided upon

until bonfires were blazing in the streets of London, to testify to the joy of the citizens at the approaching union of a princess in the line of succession to the throne of England and the champion of the Reformation.

Seldom, if ever indeed, was a marriage between two such illustrious persons celebrated in a more clandestine manner. It took place at nine o'clock on the evening of November 4, in the Princess Mary's bedchamber at St. James's Palace. "The King, who gave her away," writes Dr. Edward Lake, the young tutor of Mary and her sister Anne, "was very pleasant all the while, for he desired that the Bishop of London* would make haste, lest his sister should be delivered of a son and so the marriage be disappointed; and when the prince endowed her with all his worldly goods, he willed to put all up in her pocket, for 'twas clear gains."†

When, at eleven o'clock, the young couple retired to bed, his Majesty came and drew the curtains, and indulged in other jocular remarks, for which, however, we must refer the reader to "The Diary of Dr. Edward Lake."

This marriage, there can be very little doubt, was the direct work of Danby, and is a signal proof of the influence which that Minister had acquired over the King. It is probable, however, that Charles did not

* Dr. Henry Compton. He had taken an active part in compelling the Duke of York to have his children educated in the doctrines of the Church of England.

† On the evening of November 7, the Duchess of York gave birth to a son, Charles, Duke of Cambridge, the fifth of James's ill-fated children to bear this title.

require very much persuasion, since the advantages which he would derive from it were perfectly obvious. As he himself told Barrillon, it would go far to remove from the minds of the nation those suspicions of his designs in favour of the Catholics which threatened so much danger to the Monarchy; while William of Orange would now regard the interests of the Crown as his own, and would support them against Shaftesbury and his friends, who were already suspected of a desire to exclude James from the succession.

There was also another reason, which Charles naturally did not confide to the French Ambassador, but of which that astute personage must have had a shrewd suspicion. It was that Charles, though by no means prepared to dispense with the French King's subsidies so long as Parliament remained in a niggardly mood, was becoming very uneasy about his bargain with Louis, and would far rather have obtained his supplies from the Commons, if only an acceptable arrangement could be arrived at with that body. Of this he was not without hope, and he believed that the marriage of the Stattholder to James's daughter would go far towards bringing it about.

As for James, he appears to have been induced to waive his natural objections to the match, partly by the reflection that the nation would now look past himself to the Protestant husband of its future Queen, but more by the firm attitude assumed by Charles, who, when he heard of possible objections on his brother's part, observed contemptuously: "Odd's fish! he *must* consent."

Louis, although "he received the news as he would have done the loss of an army," judged it prudent to dissemble his indignation, and sent his ceremonial compliments with his customary punctiliousness. But he never forgave either Charles or Danby for this virtual breach of faith, nor was it long before he found an opportunity of expressing his resentment towards both in a very practical form.

William and his bride took their departure on November 19, the King and the Duke of York accompanying them as far as Gravesend, where the vessel which was to convey them to Holland awaited them. "The princess wept grievously all the morning. . . . The Queen observing her highnesse to weep as she took leave of her Majesty, would have comforted her with the recollection of her own condition when she came into England and had never till then seen the King; to whom her highnesse presently replied: 'But, madam, you came into England; but I am going out of England.'"^{*}

It is scarcely surprising that the young princess was reluctant to leave England, since William had hitherto shown himself far from an attentive bridegroom, and the courtiers had remarked upon the prince's "sullenness and clownishness, and that he took no notice of the princess at the play and the balle, nor came to see her at St. James's the day before this designed for her departure."[†] William's mind,

^{*} "Diary of Dr. Edward Lake."

[†] Ibid.

however, was occupied just then by more important matters than love-making. His business was to overcome the wavering resolutions of Charles and induce him to throw in his lot definitely with the Allies. In this he was to a certain extent successful, and, on November 23, the English Government intervened with proposals of peace to Louis, which would have robbed him in the very flush of triumph of the north-eastern frontier which French statesmen had so long coveted. Louis's answer was a haughty refusal and a prompt discontinuance of the payments provided for in the last treaty; upon which Charles intimated that he should regard the treaty as no longer in force; and Parliament, which had been prorogued until April, was, in revenge, suddenly summoned for the beginning of February. Recognizing the mistake he had committed, Louis not only offered Charles an increased subsidy and a large present to Danby, but professed himself willing to consider the proposed conditions. But, thanks to Danby's efforts, Charles for once stood firm, and in January, 1678, a treaty was signed at The Hague, whereby England and Holland bound themselves to compel the assent of both France and Spain to the terms offered; after which Charles recalled the English troops in the French service and began preparations for war.

Louise de K roualle, although she can hardly have failed to penetrate the object of William's visit to England, had recognized the futility of attempting to dissuade Charles from giving his consent to the Dutch marriage; nor would she appear to have made

any great effort to prevent the breach with France which followed that event. The explanation is that, almost immediately after the departure of William and his bride, she fell so dangerously ill that at one time her life was despaired of, and she was compelled to keep her bed for nearly six weeks. Charles appears to have been very attentive to the duchess during this time, and even gave audience to the French Ambassador in the sick-room ; and Madame de Scudéry, in a letter to her friend Bussy-Rabutin, tells him that she has heard that at the crisis of her illness "Kéroualle preached to the King, crucifix in hand, to detach him from women." The writer adds that "three or four days after this, feeling better, she forced herself to rise and dragged herself into the royal box at the theatre, where the King was sitting with Madame de Mazarin."

The rivalry between the two duchesses was now less bitter, they having apparently arrived at a kind of tacit understanding to share Charles's attentions and benefits between them. But, with the exception of Nell Gwyn, whom they knew it was futile to try and get rid of, both were determined not to tolerate any other pretender to the rank of favourite.

In the spring of 1677, Sidonie de Lenoncourt, Marquise de Courcelles, the lady who had shared Madame de Mazarin's seclusion in the Couvent des Filles de Sainte-Marie at Paris and co-operated with her in making things so unpleasant for the luckless inmates of that institution, arrived in England, "which," wrote Barrillon to Pomponne, "is now the refuge of all the women who have quarrelled with their husbands."

Madame de Courcelles, who had had an even more romantic career than the duchess, was one of the most beautiful women in France, and the description of her own charms which she has left us in her *Mémoires** would appear to be but little exaggerated; indeed, Madame de Sévigné declares that "to see and to adore her is the same thing." That she had come to England in the hope of finding favour in the eyes of Charles II. appears only too probable; but Madame de Mazarin had no mind to lend herself to such a design, and she gently but firmly intimated to her former ally that, though his Majesty's heart might be a capacious one, there was not room in it for two Frenchwomen at the same time, and persuaded her to return to France.

On her side, the Duchess of Portsmouth, Barrillon tells us, prevailed upon Charles to refuse the entry to his cabinet to Mrs. Myddelton, having ascertained that that lady was conspiring with Lady Harvey "to engage the King to honour Mlle. Myddelton† with his attentions," and that "Madame Myddelton only brought her daughter there with the design to please, which is a capital offence in her eyes." This rebuff

* "I am tall; I have an admirable figure; I have rather fine eyes, which I never quite open, and this is a charm which renders my glance the sweetest and most tender in the world. I have a well-formed bosom, divine hands, passable arms, that is to say, a little thin, but I find consolation for this misfortune in the pleasure of having the most beautiful legs in the world."

† Jane Myddelton, the younger, who had inherited her mother's good looks, was at this time in her sixteenth year. She afterwards married Charles May, son of Sir Algernon May, of Hampton.

greatly exasperated Mrs. Myddelton and Lady Harvey, who did everything they could to incite Madame de Mazarin against the duchess, and endeavoured to form a cabal to effect her overthrow. But Louise was well able to hold her own, and in the summer of 1678 Barrillon reported that she appeared to be held in greater consideration than she was when he arrived in England. "I cannot doubt that the King speaks to her of everything—and that she is able to do much to insinuate what she wishes. I believe also that milord Treasurer [Danby] makes use of her to accomplish things which he does not wish to propose himself. She takes great pains to let me see how jealous she is for the interests of the King [Louis XIV.]" He added that the most influential courtiers, such as the Earl of Sunderland, who was on terms of close friendship with the duchess, were on her side.

But whatever the degree of "consideration" in which Louise de Kéroualle happened to be held, she had never any reason to complain of the generosity of her royal admirer, for year after year immense sums were poured into her coffers. What may be described as her official salary, a mere beggarly £12,000 a year, was, of course, quite insufficient for the requirements of so magnificent a dame—indeed, to judge from the details of a man's costume made for her, presumably for a fancy-dress ball, which is preserved in the British Museum, it could barely have sufficed for her personal adornment; while she not infrequently dissipated a small fortune at the basset-table in a single evening. It had therefore to be supplemented by frequent grants, which the accounts of the secret service funds show

generally aggregated something like £40,000 annually, though in one year—1681—they rose to over £136,000. In addition to all this, she appears to have derived a comfortable revenue from the sale of royal pardons to well-to-do offenders against the Law, for which purpose she retained the services of one Timothy Hall, who did a brisk and lucrative business on her behalf.

On February 7 Parliament reassembled, and Charles opened the session with a speech which meant war with France and demanded supplies for ninety ships and forty thousand men. But his request was far from meeting with the ready acceptance he appears to have anticipated. The Shaftesbury section of the Opposition,* who utterly distrusted Charles and hated Danby, affected to believe that the King desired a standing army, not for war with France, but for the purpose of establishing despotic power. To overthrow Danby and secure liberty of conscience for Protestant Non-conformists at home were their main objects, and for this they were ready to render Louis free of all interference from Charles. And, astonishing as it may seem, they were actually in league with Louis. For that monarch, anxious at all cost to render England impotent for a few months longer, had begun a new line of policy. Recognizing that it was hopeless to rely in any way on Charles's word, he had decided that the only course left was to deprive him of all power, either of helping or hindering him, by keeping him constantly employed at home. He therefore entered

* Shaftesbury himself was not set at liberty until February 26. He took his seat in the House of Lords on the following day.

into negotiations with the Country party; and while he was subsidizing Charles against the Opposition, he was subsidizing the Opposition against Charles. In fact, he kept both in his pay, on condition that they should not compose their differences and make common cause against him, and thus, by craftily fostering the quarrels between the King of England and his people, he prolonged the impotence of England in Continental affairs. "I leave to your zeal and to your address," he wrote to Barrillon, "to make use of the good intentions and the authority of the King of England against the Parliament, and of the Parliament likewise to render of no effect the resolutions which that prince might take against me."*

This double intrigue was an affair after Barrillon's own heart, and he conducted it with his usual address. Unhappily for the reputation of a good many of the politicians of the time, all his despatches and accounts have been preserved, and they make very instructive reading. One may learn there, the tariff of the English patriots, the disinterestedness of the Puritans who preserved in their soul the cult of pure "principles," the integrity of the Government officials. One may read how Henry Powle, one of the leaders of the Puritan party, who two years later was to distinguish himself by the violence of his attacks on the honest but unfortunate Stafford, entered into "a close connexion" with Barrillon, and received from the Ambassador's own hands "the money mentioned in the account;" how that hero of Nonconformity, Algernon Sidney, received from the King of France five hundred

* Forneron.

guineas each session of Parliament ; * and how certain officials of the Admiralty and the Exchequer were paid £400 in exchange for some valuable memoranda.†

Unable to oppose openly the war policy, the Shaftesbury faction determined to insist upon conditions of peace so onerous that Louis XIV. would be justified in continuing the war, and, at the same time, to render Charles powerless to join the coalition. In this they were successful, for though the men and ships which Charles demanded were voted, and a resolution agreed upon "to raise £1,000,000 to enable his Majesty to enter into actual war with the French King," the declaration of war failed to appear ; and, in the meanwhile, Louis, by a series of skilful movements, captured Ghent and Ypres and invested Mons. Charles, as a concession to popular clamour, sent 3,000 men to Ostend, but he privately assured Barrillon that he had no real desire for war and would do

* "Mr. Sidney," wrote Barrillon to Louis XIV., "has been of great service to me on many occasions. He is a man who was in the first wars ; and is naturally an enemy to the Court. He has for some time been suspected of being gained by Lord Sunderland, but he always appeared to me to have the same sentiment and not to have changed his principles. He has a great deal of influence among the Independents, and is also intimate with those who are opposed to the Court in Parliament. . . . I gave him only what your Majesty permitted me. He would willingly have had more, and, if a new *gratification* were given him, it would be easy to engage him entirely. . . . I believe he is a man who would be very useful in the affairs of England, should they be brought to extremities." In a second letter, the Ambassador describes him as "a man of great views and high designs, which tend to the establishment of a republic."

"It is doubtless true," observes Professor Firth, in his article on Algernon Sidney, in the "Dictionary of National Biography," "that Sidney used the money for public and not for private, objects, but this is an insufficient excuse for his conduct."

† Ferneron.

everything in his power to avoid it. He appears, indeed, to have been in a pitiable state of uncertainty; and it was with profound relief that he learned early in April that William of Orange had succeeded in obtaining from Louis a truce of three months, which furnished him with a pretext for withdrawing from his connexion with the Dutch, on the ground that the truce had been made without his advice or consent. The Commons, notwithstanding the opposition of Shaftesbury's faction, carried a resolution of adherence to the war policy. But, as their distrust of Charles's intentions prevented them from voting the supplies he required, his Majesty, in disgust, had recourse once more to Louis; and, after the customary haggling, made a private treaty with him, by which he promised, in consideration of receiving the sum of 6,000,000 livres a year for three years, to use his best endeavours to secure peace on terms favourable to France within two months, and, in the event of not being successful, to disband his troops and prorogue Parliament. The compact itself was drawn up and signed by Charles alone, for Danby had refused to imperil his safety by appending his name; but the Minister had consented to write the despatches in which Ralph Montagu, the British Ambassador in Paris, was instructed to demand payment for his master's good offices, Charles adding: "This letter is written by my order. C.R."

Scarcely was this bargain struck, when Louis attempted to evade the terms of peace which he had himself offered, and an immediate renewal of the war appeared imminent. Charles, alarmed by the

indignation which the French King's action aroused in England, thereupon declined to ratify his secret treaty with Louis, declaring that his people would chase him from his kingdom if France were suffered to extend her conquests, and despatched Sir William Temple to The Hague, to make a fresh treaty with Holland to compel the withdrawal of the French pretensions. But, though the treaty was duly signed, the Dutch had by this time lost all faith in England, and on August 10 they came to terms with France and gave the signal for the general peace of Nimwegen, which, in putting an end for a time to the sanguinary struggle which the Treaty of Dover had brought upon Europe, made Louis "the arbiter of all in this portion of our hemisphere."*

* La Fare, *Mémoires*.

CHAPTER XV

THE POPISH PLOT

THE Peace signed, Louis XIV. no longer either needed or feared Charles, and determined to punish him for the marriage of his niece and for the duplicity of which he had been guilty during the last few months. He therefore met his appeal for payment of at least a part of the money he claimed with a contemptuous refusal, and determined to reveal him to his people in his true colours, and, at the same time, to wreak his vengeance upon Danby, whom he knew to be his consistent enemy. Nor had he far to look for an instrument.

Ralph Montagu, the British Ambassador in Paris, had for some time past been a great admirer of the Duchess of Cleveland—indeed, he is believed to have been indebted for his appointment to the good offices of that lady—and when the latter migrated to the French capital, it was not long before they became on very intimate terms, as may be gathered from the following singular specimens of orthography which her Grace addressed to him :

“friday. before I reseued yours, I was in expectation of seing you to daye, but the ocation that

hindars you comming I am extremely sorry for, being realy and kindly consarned for you and all that relats to you. I doe ashuer you I am as much afflicted for your garls illness as if she ware my one, and shall be as unease till I heare she is better. I was yesterday at Paris, but not hauing the Pleausher of seing you thar mayd me dislike it more than euer."

" tuesday. I will yeld the disscret part to you, thoue not the other, for notwithstanding the but, I doe ashuer you the ten days will be more griuos [grievous] to me than to you."

Nothing occurred to interrupt the harmony of the relations between the Ambassador and the duchess for some time, during which, according to what the latter afterwards asserted, Montagu, whose ambitions soared far beyond a mere embassy and who aspired, first to the post of Secretary of State and afterwards to the Treasury, made her the confidante of his designs and also of the very unflattering opinions which he held of Charles II. and the Duke of York. But a lady of such exquisite sensibility as her Grace could not be expected to steel her heart for long against the passionate appeals of other admirers; and presently, though without discarding Montagu, she embarked upon a romance with a certain Chevalier de Chastillon, a captain in the guards of the Duc d'Orléans, who, starting life "without means, intelligence or wit," had, Saint-Simon tells us, "made his fortune by his face." Unfortunately, Montagu's suspicions were aroused, and having, by some means, succeeded in getting possession of some highly com-

promising letters which the duchess had written to her new adorer, he resolved to punish her for her faithlessness by sending them to Charles II. However, he took no steps in the matter until the very eve of the lady's departure on a visit to England in the spring of 1678, and they took leave of one another on apparently the best of terms.

But when the duchess arrived in London, Charles informed her that he had certain letters of hers in his possession, adding sarcastically: "Madam, all that I ask of you for your own sake, is to live for the future so as to make the least noise you can, and I care not whom you love."

The lady returned to Paris boiling with indignation against Montagu, nor was her anger lessened by learning what had occurred during her absence.

Some months before, the young Countess of Sussex, whose relations with her husband had become very strained, had separated from the earl and joined her mother in Paris, where she was placed in a convent at Conflans.* But, while the Duchess of Cleveland was in England, Charles, being of opinion that the girl ought not to be allowed to remain any longer under the maternal influence, sent secret instructions to Montagu to effect the removal of the Countess of Sussex to a convent in Paris, and afterwards to send her back to England. The mother, however, ignorant that the Ambassador was acting on the King's instructions, imagined that he was carrying on an

* At Conflans was situated the country-house of the amorous Archbishop of Paris, already referred to, which may perhaps account for the selection of that particular convent.

intrigue with her flighty daughter—certainly, if what she says of his proceedings be true, she seems to have had every excuse for her belief—and wrote to Charles complaining bitterly of the supposed *liaison*. “She [the Countess of Sussex],” she writes, “has never been in the monastery two daies together, but every day gone out with the Ambassador, and has often layen four daies together at my house and sent for her meat to the Ambassador, he being allwaies with her till five o’clock in y^e morning, they shut up together alone, and w^d not let any *maistre d’hotel* wait nor any of my servants, onely the Ambassador’s. This made so great a noise at Paris that she is now the holle discours. I am so much afflicted that I can hardly write this for crying, to see that a child that I doated on as I did on her sh^d. make so ill a return, and join with the worst of men to ruin me.”

Then, in the extremity of her wrath, the exasperated duchess went on to denounce Montagu and to reveal the political intrigues of that personage, with which their previous intimacy had made her acquainted. Montagu had told her, she declared, that he intended to secure the Secretaryship and to make that post a stepping-stone to that of Lord Treasurer, which obtained, he would easily supply Charles with money for his pocket and his women and lead him by the nose. To facilitate his nefarious purposes, he had corrupted a French astrologer in whom the King believed, and counted on his assistance to mould his Majesty to his designs. “For he has neither conscience nor honour, and has several times told me that in his hart he despised you and y^r Brother; and

that, for his part, he wished with all his hart that the Parliament w^d send you both to travell, for you were a dull, governable fool, and the Duke a willfull fool. So that it was yet better to have you than him, but that you allwaies chose a greater beast than y^eself to govern you."

Without waiting for leave to quit his post, Montagu hurried back to England to defend himself, only to find that he had been already struck out of the Privy Council and superseded as Ambassador by the Earl of Sunderland.

Now Montagu, "as arrant a knave as any in his time," as Swift calls him, had in his possession the originals of letters from Danby, which had been written by the King's command, relating to the secret treaty of May 27 with Louis XIV., and he knew that their disclosure, in the present state of public feeling, would undoubtedly ruin the Treasurer—to whose enmity he attributed the fact that he had been disgraced without being suffered to defend himself—and destroy what confidence the nation might still retain in the honour of its King. In concert with Shaftesbury, he accordingly approached Barrillon and offered to produce these letters to the House of Commons and cause the fall of Danby within six months, in consideration of a pension of forty thousand livres a year or one hundred thousand crowns in hand. The proposal was accepted, and Montagu thereupon stood for the borough of Northampton at a bye-election, defeated the Government candidate, and prepared to accuse Danby before the Commons. What followed constitutes one of the most dramatic incidents in Parliamentary history.

Danby, warned by his cousin Reresby of the impending blow, resolved to be beforehand with his enemy, and on December 19, 1678, the Chancellor of the Exchequer informed the House of Commons that "his Majesty having received information that his late Ambassador in France, Mr. Montagu, had held several private conferences with the Pope's Nuncio there, has, to the end that he may discover the truth of the matter, given orders for the seizure of Mr. Montagu's papers." But Danby had to deal with a man who in cunning was more than his match.

To the heated debate which at once rose, Montagu listened in silence until directly appealed to, when he rose and intervened in the most effective manner, by observing that "he believed that the motive of the orders for the seizure of his cabinet and papers was the desire of the Government to get into their hands some letters of great consequence that he had to produce regarding the designs of a great Minister of State." He added that the letters mentioned were not in the cabinet where they were supposed to be, but in another which he had entrusted to the custody of his friends.

The cabinet was sent for, but, as it was locked and the key was in Danby's office, a smith was fetched and the lock forced. Thereupon Montagu took out some papers and handed them to the Speaker, who, amid breathless silence, read to the House two letters, the second of which was dated March 25, 1678, only five days after a large supply had been voted for the purpose of war with France. They directed Montagu to demand from Louis XIV. 6,000,000 livres a year, in the event of the French conditions of peace being

accepted through Charles's efforts. They were both signed by Danby, while to each was added in the King's handwriting : " This letter is writ by my order. C.R."

Although Montagu had violated in the grossest manner the only understanding upon which ministerial government can be carried on, no one paused to think of that in the tempest of indignation which the revelation of Charles's baseness excited. As the King himself could not be touched, all this indignation was directed against the Minister, upon whose advice he was technically supposed to have acted ; and, after a stormy debate, a resolution to impeach the Treasurer on a charge of high treason was adopted by the Commons. On the 21st, the articles of impeachment were voted, and, two days later, Danby was called upon to defend himself before the Lords. This he did in a speech of conspicuous ability, in which he argued that " the letters were writ by the King's command upon the subject of peace and war, wherein his Majesty was at all times sole judge and ought to be obeyed, not only by all Ministers of State, but by all subjects." He also emphatically denied the charge that he himself was in the French interest, and declared that he had always done his utmost to dissuade the King from entering into any political connexion with France.

The Lords refused to accede to the Commons' demand for a committal until they had heard the grounds upon which it was based. The Lower House returned to the attack with redoubled fury. In the end, Charles, to save his Minister, found himself obliged to adopt the very course to which Shaftesbury and his friends had long been endeavouring to force

him ; and on January 24, 1679, declaring that he would no longer be a mere Doge of Venice, he dissolved the Parliament, which had now sat for eighteen years, and which during that time had changed from fervid loyalty to a state of bitter hostility to the Court and the Crown.

The indignation against Danby would perhaps have been less vehement, had not the disclosures of Montagu come in the midst of that extraordinary outburst of national insanity which is known to history as the "Popish Plot," though it might more properly be called the "Popish Terror." The only tangible evidence to support the fabrications of the villainous Titus Oates and his fellow-informers was a bundle of letters in the possession of Coleman, the Duke of York's secretary, which contained the expression of the desire of the more ardent Catholics to do a little of what Charles had actually done, that is, to obtain the assistance of Louis XIV. to govern without Parliament and secure the re-establishment of the Catholic religion and the suppression of heresy. But there was not the smallest proof of connivance with any plot for assassination or rebellion, except the testimony of Oates and Bedloe. However, the credulity and horror of the people, already sufficiently excited by Oates's allegations, developed into a veritable frenzy when Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, the magistrate before whom the scoundrel had laid his information, was found dead on Primrose Hill with his own sword thrust through his heart. His death was assumed to be an attempt on the part of the Jesuits to "stifle the plot." No man

felt his life to be safe, unless armed, and it became the custom to carry a little flail, loaded with lead, called a Protestant flail. At Godfrey's funeral, at the sermon, "besides the preacher, two other thumping divines stood up in the pulpit," to guard him from being killed; and when, on October 21, Parliament met, the Commons, after hearing Coleman's letters read, passed a resolution, "That this House is of opinion that there hath been and still is a damnable and hellish plot, carried on by Papish recusants, for assassinating and murdering the King, for subverting the Government, and rooting out the Protestant religion."

When a nation is ripe for crises such as this, there is never wanting a politician to place himself at the service of its passions. Shaftesbury, now once more at liberty after his long imprisonment and hopeless of foiling Charles's policy in any other way, threw himself into the agitation.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, was undoubtedly the ablest English statesman of his age, and, whatever his personal ambition may have been, his public aims in his later years were wise and far-sighted. But to attain them he shrank from nothing. From the time when, as an undergraduate at Oxford, he had organized a rebellion of the "freshers" of his college against the oppressive customs enforced by the senior men, and secured their abolition, he may be said to have been marked out as a popular leader. At eighteen he was a member of the Short Parliament, though, on account of his age, he was not allowed to vote or to take part in its deliberations. On the outbreak of the Civil War, he threw in his lot with the

King ; then, foreseeing, even in the midst of the royalist successes, the ultimate ruin of the royal cause, he passed over to the Parliament, and under the Commonwealth became, in the contemptuous words of Dryden, "the loudest bagpipe of the squeaking train." Alienated by the absolutism of Cromwell's rule, he, after the Protector's death, changed sides once more, and the active part he took in the recall of Charles II. was rewarded at the Restoration with a peerage (Baron Ashley) and with promotion to a foremost place in the royal counsels. As he had sought popularity with the Puritans by an affectation of sanctity, he now courted the favour of the King by counterfeiting a debauchery which surprised even his master. "You are the wickedest dog in England!" laughed Charles at some obscene jest of his Minister's. "Of a subject, Sir, perhaps I am!" was the unabashed retort. But Shaftesbury's debauchery was merely a pretence, for he was as incapable of libertinage as of piety, as debilitated in body as he was sceptical in mind, with a long, pale face seared with wrinkles, and a "pigmy body" shaken by a continual nervous tremor.

Although he was in religion at best a deist,* Shaftesbury remained the representative of the Presbyterian and Nonconformist element in the Council, and was the constant and vehement advocate of toleration. His advocacy was, however, based on purely political grounds, from the desire to put an end to the divisions

* The state of his mind is perhaps best represented by an anecdote in Sheffield's memoirs, which makes him reply to a lady who had questioned him as to his religion: "Madam, wise men are but of one religion;" and when she pressed him further to tell her what that was: "Madam, wise men never tell."



ANTHONY ASHLEY COOPER, FIRST EARL OF SHAFTESBURY

From an engraving by R. White.

which left English liberty exposed to invasion from the Crown and robbed England of all influence in Europe.* He offered a strenuous, though fruitless, resistance to the intolerant measures of Clarendon, and it was largely due to the unscrupulous ability with which he intrigued against him that the great Minister owed his fall. Believing himself strong enough to use Charles for his own purposes, he accepted the Chancellorship and the earldom of Shaftesbury, and up to 1673 identified himself with the royal policy, even to the extent of making a violent speech in favour of the French alliance, though at heart he was bitterly opposed to it. But, having by some means learned the secret of the Treaty of Dover, he entirely changed his attitude, gave his uncompromising support to the Test Act, and entered into an alliance with the Country party in the House of Commons. In November, 1673, he was ordered to deliver up the Seals, and though very soon afterwards Charles, perceiving the mistake he had committed, offered him a dukedom and any office he might desire, while Louis XIV., through Ruvigny, offered him a bribe of 10,000 guineas, he refused all proposals for an accommodation, and placed himself openly at the head of the Country party, whose movements he directed from the Lords with all the skill of a modern party-leader.

Shaftesbury despaired of bringing the House of Commons, elected as it had been immediately after the Restoration in a moment of religious and political reaction, to any steady opposition to the Crown, and

* J. R. Green, "History of the English People."

he was anxious at all costs to bring about a dissolution. With a new House, which really represented the feelings of the constituencies, he was determined to force on Charles his brother's exclusion from the throne, for he foresaw that, with a Catholic King like James, convinced of his Divine Right and bigoted in his religious fervour, no securities for the maintenance of the Protestant faith would be of any value. His resolve was justified by the Revolution, which finally did the work which he proposed to do. Unhappily, he did not scruple to fight with any weapon, however vile, so long as it promised to be an effective one.

And such a weapon lay ready to his hand in the panic which had now seized upon the country. The temptation to use it to get rid of James and the Catholic succession was irresistible, for the cry of exclusion followed naturally upon that of the "Plot." According to Burnet, he declared that the evidence must be supported, and, however that may be, there can be little doubt that he made it his business to procure the evidence of informers and to hound them on by threats or bribery. "I mightily suspect that that old knave hath been guilty of many subornations in the management of the Popish Plot," observed Bishop Prideaux two years later.

Shaftesbury's "management" of the agitation, on its political side, was characterized by a ruthless energy. On November 4, 1678, the great attack was opened, at his instigation, by Lord Russell, in the Commons, who moved and carried an address to the King praying him to remove the Duke of York from his

person and counsels. On November 20, Shaftesbury carried a bill in the Lords, disabling all Roman Catholics from sitting in either House, an amendment exempting James from its operation only escaping defeat by two votes in the Commons. This exclusion remained in force for a century and a half.

Meanwhile, five Catholic peers—the Earl of Powis, Viscount Stafford, and Lords Arundel of Wardour, Belassis and Petre, accused by Oates of complicity in the “Plot,” had been arrested and sent to the Tower, while the prisons were crowded with suspected persons. Encouraged by his success, the informer struck at the highest game, and on November 24 he denounced the Queen before Secretary Coventry as privy to a design of poisoning the King—an accusation which he had the effrontery to repeat four days later before Charles himself in Council and at the Bar of the House of Commons. Monstrous as the charge may appear, it found ready acceptance in the Commons, who carried an address to the King praying him to remove her Majesty from his person and counsels. The Lords refused to agree; but, to their eternal disgrace, Shaftesbury and two other peers signed a protest against their action.

The fresh “revelations” of Oates and a rival in infamy named Bedloe, who swore to the existence of a plot for the landing of a Catholic army and a general massacre of the Protestants, roused Parliament and people to renewed frenzy. The peers under arrest were ordered to be impeached; a royal proclamation enjoined the arrest of every Catholic in the realm; and the condemnation and barbarous

execution of Coleman, after a mockery of a trial, was the signal for a succession of judicial murders which has left an indelible stain on English justice. In fact, for some time, it was useless for the accused to hope for anything approaching a fair trial; and the Lord Chief-Justice, Scroggs, lent himself shamelessly to uphold the perjuries of the informers.*

Charles II. was terrified. His Catholic mistresses forgot their quarrels in the face of this common danger. Already Oates had denounced the Duchesse de Mazarin as "an accomplice of all the designs against the Protestant religion." "Yesterday," wrote the Duke of York to William of Orange on October 29, 1678, "Madame de Mazarin was accused by the same man; when he will make an end of accusing people, the Lord knows!" Louise de K roualle, who had a Catholic priest attached to her household as chaplain, felt that her unpopularity marked her out for attack, and that, in such a crisis, the King, whom she saw prepared for any submissions, would be incapable of protecting her. She began seriously to consider the advisability of abandoning the field and returning to France.

* "Have no fear, Mr. Coleman," remarked this personage, at the opening of Coleman's trial, "you will not be condemned unless your crimes are proved. We shall not act like you, who wish to assassinate us." Thus, the Lord Chief Justice of England regarded as admitted, before any evidence had been given, the imaginary crime which the false witnesses had invented.

It is, we fear, with only too much justification that a French historian has observed: "It is a strange thing that the English nation, the most imbued with the idea of justice, the most respectful towards the Law, the most meticulous observer of its forms, is also that which has furnished, not only the greatest number of servile judges, but also the most revolting examples of judicial iniquity."

"Madame de Portsmouth," writes Barrillon, at the beginning of December, "has spoken to me as though she were not sure of remaining here. There are many persons who are anxious to name her in the Parliament. She affected to tell me that she did not regard the prospect of her retirement to France as a great misfortune; that your Majesty had caused her to be given by milord Sunderland* assurances of his benevolence and protection; that she would not desire that her presence should injure or cause embarrassment to the King [Charles], and that she should prefer to withdraw while she still possessed some share in his good graces, as she might perhaps be attacked at a time when the King would not have for her all the consideration that he has at present."†

Charles II. has found apologists for most of the actions of his life. His concurrence in the savage acts of oppression by which the Church signalized her triumph over the Nonconformists at the beginning of the Restoration; his abandonment of his faithful Minister Clarendon; the diversion of the supplies voted by Parliament for national purposes into the coffers of his rapacious concubines; his disgraceful subservience to the ambition of Louis XIV. and all the long course of trickery and deceit which that subservience involved; his delivery of the Covenanters of Scotland to the tender mercies of the brutal Lauderdale—all these things, and many like them, have been palliated with more or less want of success. But no

* The Earl of Sunderland had, as we have mentioned, replaced Ralph Montagu as British Ambassador in Paris in the summer of 1678.

† Barrillon to Louis XIV., December 1, 1678, cited by M. Forneron.

one—no one, at least, whose name carries the smallest weight—has ever yet attempted to palliate or excuse the almost inconceivable baseness of his conduct at the time of the “Popish Plot.”

“That story,” observes the late Mr. Traill in his able monograph on Shaftesbury, “resolves itself virtually into two propositions: first, that there was a plot on foot to establish the Roman Catholic religion, by force, if necessary, in the three kingdoms; and, secondly, that there was a conspiracy hatched for the assassination of the King. Now, to Shaftesbury, the former of these propositions must have presented itself as true, but not new; the latter, as new, but so utterly inconsistent with certain facts involved in the former that it could not possibly be true. That there *was* a conspiracy to set up the Roman Catholic religion in England we all know in these days, and Shaftesbury knew it then; but he knew also, as we now know, that the King himself was the chief conspirator. He knew, and had known for fully five years, that Charles was a party to a treaty by which he had bound himself to Louis XIV. to attempt the forcible establishment of Catholicism in England; and he had probably a shrewd suspicion that Oates’s charges were, so far as they went, merely founded on a belated discovery of the secret provisions of the Treaty of Dover. When, then, the informer asked the world to believe in the assassination plot as *part and parcel* of the conspiracy against Protestantism, Shaftesbury must have known that he was lying.”

Now, all that Mr. Traill says of Shaftesbury applies with tenfold force to Charles II. Charles knew Oates and his fellows to be lying, and, what is more,

he did not attempt to conceal his knowledge, at any rate, from his intimates. Reresby tells us that on November 12, 1678, when he was with the King in the Duchess of Portsmouth's apartments, his Majesty was "very free in his discourse concerning the witnesses of the Popish Plot, making it clearly appear that several things which they gave in evidence were not only improbable, but impossible. And a few days later (November 21), he observed that 'Bedloe was a rogue and had given false evidence.'"

And yet, though he knew those men to be liars—knew them to be the fabricators of one of the most abominable impostures ever foisted upon a nation—he did not stir a finger to stem the popular frenzy, and allowed men of whose innocence he was assured—men who were his co-religionists, since he was a Catholic in all but the name—to go, mainly through the false testimony of these miscreants, to mutilation and death without speaking the word which would have saved them. Nay, he went much further than that. Not only did he not attempt to stay the agitation, but he actually encouraged it. Not only did he sacrifice these innocent victims of a monstrous delusion to the terror and fury of a credulous people, but he persecuted them.

With the money which he had lately drawn from Louis XIV. "for his declaration of Catholicism," he maintained Oates and his band of false witnesses. He assigned them lodgings within the precincts of his own palace; he surrounded them with his guards; he gave orders that extraordinary precautions should be observed in the preparation of their meals, lest some attempt should be made to poison them; he recruited with

his money their assistants ; he paid the expenses of the arrest of their victims. "At the bottom of the purse which his mistresses drain, he finds £10 a week for Titus Oates, lodged and boarded at Whitehall ; soon he increases the sum and gives him £12 a week ; he pays the witnesses, he pays the informers. He is not forced by the Protestants to incur these expenses, on the contrary, he conceals them. It is with the secret funds, the money destined for his concubines, that, out of the pure flattery for those whom he knows to be false witnesses and murderers, he pays ' £10 to Millicent Hanson, for services in seeking out priests ; ' to Massall, £20 for having arrested a priest ; ' to Dangerfield, to Titus Oates, in addition to their salaries, a number of gratuities for legal expenses, for the discovery of Papists concealed at the Court, as compensation for the inconvenience to which they were put in going to give their evidence, for information respecting the property of the Jesuits, or as a simple present."*

Only in one instance did Charles display a vestige of chivalry : he had manhood enough to refuse to be a party to the persecution of his wife.

"They think," said he, "that I have a mind to a new wife, but, for all that, I will not see an innocent woman abused." And, on another occasion, he observed that "she was a weak woman and had some disagreeable humours ; but was not capable of a wicked thing ; and, considering his own faultiness to her in some things, he thought it a horrid thing to abandon of her."

The poor Queen, indeed, saw in him her only refuge against the storm ; and when he went to Newmarket

* *Forneron, Louise de Kéroualle, Duchesse de Portsmouth.*

for the Spring Meeting of 1680, she followed him thither, declaring that she could not feel in safety save where the King was present to protect her. "This, then," observes Mr. Airy, "is the sum of what can be claimed for Charles: that he would not desert his wife at the bidding of Oates."

What, it will be asked, is the explanation of Charles's conduct throughout this shameful affair? The answer is contained in a single word—policy. He knew that if he *publicly* announced his dissent from what had become for the moment the firm conviction of the great majority of the nation; if he attempted to restrain the popular frenzy; if he exercised the royal prerogative of mercy on behalf of the condemned, the suspicions that already existed in many minds as to his bargain with Louis XIV. would be at once confirmed, and so furious would be the outcry against him that, if he were permitted to retain his throne, it would only be on the condition of his consenting to the exclusion of his brother from the succession.

On the other hand, he foresaw that, by encouraging rather than repressing the agitation, by giving the Country party, or the Whigs, as they were now called, "line enough"—to borrow his own words—he would sooner or later bring about a strong, and possibly, a violent, reaction, of which he intended to take advantage to crush the Exclusionists and make the Shaftesburys, the Russells and the Sidneys pay to the uttermost farthing for all the humiliations to which they had subjected him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE EXCLUSION BILL

THE elections for the new Parliament were held in the midst of a ferment of excitement, and the result, as might be expected, was a complete triumph for the Country party. The House of Commons assembled (March 6, 1679) in a furious temper, burning with Protestant zeal and full of anger against Danby, who had just been created a marquis by the King. In his speech from the throne, Charles, after asking for supplies to maintain the Protestant attitude of the Government in foreign affairs, declared that he would defend the established religion and the laws with his life. But the Commons appeared to attach but little weight to his Majesty's assurances, and, notwithstanding that the King had assumed entire responsibility for the incriminating letters which had been written by his order, and had accorded Danby a free pardon, the proceedings against the Treasurer were at once resumed. Warned by a message from Charles, Danby fled for sanctuary to Whitehall, upon which the Lords passed a bill of banishment against him if he did not appear before

them, but avoided naming the day. The Commons threw it out as too moderate, and sent up a bill of attainder to the Lords, which they passed (April 14), to take effect should Danby not surrender himself within seven days. On the 17th he gave himself up, and was forthwith committed to the Tower, where he remained for five years.

The Commons, spurred on by Shaftesbury, continued its violent course. To avoid the excitement which his presence caused, the King had persuaded the Duke of York to retire to Brussels. But this precaution availed nothing; for Shaftesbury and his adherents were absolutely determined on the exclusion of James from the throne, as the only way of securing the liberties of the country.

Meanwhile, in alarm at the violence of the new Parliament, Charles had had recourse to Sir William Temple, who proposed a scheme of government which, he hoped, might oppose a barrier to both the despotism of the Crown and the excesses of the Commons. His plan, which was accepted by the King, was the formation of a Council of Thirty, which included Russell, Essex and other leaders of the Opposition, while Shaftesbury was not only admitted, but established as President. Without the advice of this Council, the King, it was understood, pledged himself not to act. The scheme, however, was a failure. The question of the Succession overshadowed all others. Shaftesbury was earnest for the exclusion of James, but as yet the majority of the Council were unprepared to go so far, and supported a plan which Charles brought forward for preserving the rights of

the Duke of York, while restraining his power as Sovereign. This compromise Shaftesbury refused to consider; and a bill for depriving James of his rights to the Crown, and for devolving it on the next Protestant in the line of succession, was introduced into the Commons by his adherents and passed the House by a large majority. To gain time, Charles first prorogued and then dissolved Parliament; and, apparently on the advice of the Duchess of Portsmouth, resolved to have recourse once more to Louis XIV., whose assistance might enable him to dispense with the necessity of summoning another for some months at least.

At the beginning of July, the King sent word to Barrillon by the Duchess of Portsmouth that he wished to speak to him privately; and late that night, when everyone in the palace had retired to rest, the Ambassador came to the favourite's apartments at Whitehall, where he found Charles awaiting him. The King told Barrillon that Louis XIV. could, if he wished, preserve his throne for him and attach him for all the rest of his life to his interests; that the time for compliments and speeches was past, and that it was necessary for Louis to decide if it were of importance to him whether England were in future a republic or a monarchy, as matters had come to such a pass that, unless the King of France made up his mind to support him against his subjects, nothing could prevent Parliament from disposing absolutely of questions of peace and war and the making of treaties with foreign States. Finally, he urged the Ambassador to repeat all that he had told him to his

master, and "to beg him to take the course which for the rest of his [Charles's] life would make England dependent upon him and attach him indissolubly to his interests."

Barrillon deemed the occasion opportune to reproach the King with his failure to keep his engagements to France, and reminded him of the marriage of his niece to William of Orange, the alliance with Holland, and the little confidence that France had hitherto been able to repose in the promised neutrality of England.

Charles admitted that these reproaches were well-founded, though not quite just. He had not foreseen all the difficulties which had arisen to prevent him from adhering to his engagements. He had been unable to resist the pressure that had been brought to bear upon him by his brother and Danby, who, to court popularity, had constantly urged him to adopt a policy hostile to France. He had done all in his power to keep faith with Louis, but circumstances had been too strong for him. Anyway, the experience through which he had passed ought to be regarded by the King of France as an "entire guarantee for his conduct in the future," and "to inspire him with the belief that nothing would detach him from his interests."

In an audience which Barrillon had of the King about a week later, the Ambassador informed him of the astonishment with which his master had learned of the number of unfortunate Catholics who had been sent to the scaffold without any attempt on the part of Charles to exercise his prerogative of

mercy. To which Charles replied that, though it was a great grief to him to see so much innocent blood shed, he could not stand between the condemned and the fury of the people, "without risking everything."

The reply of Louis XIV. to Charles's appeal for assistance was that such could only be granted in return for a positive engagement not to allow Parliament to meet until the autocrat at Versailles was pleased to sanction it.

Charles had no choice but to consent, and, in an interview with Barrillon in the Duchess of Portsmouth's apartments at the end of August, declared that he was prepared "to bind himself not to summon a Parliament for several years, and only then if the King of France himself should consider that there was no danger in doing so." He was, however, profoundly disgusted when he learned the sum with which it was proposed to reward his subservience to French interests. For the Ambassador, having reminded him that the separate peace which the Parliament had forced him to make with Holland had been mainly responsible for the prolongation of the late war and the consequent exhaustion of the French finances, and that therefore he could not reasonably expect to be subsidized with such generosity as heretofore, announced that he was authorized to offer him the sum of 500,000 livres, in consideration of his engaging not to summon Parliament before March, 1680.

Barrillon reported that Charles showed "great surprise at the offer of so mediocre a sum, and spoke with much heat concerning the extremity to which

he was reduced of placing himself in entire dependence on your Majesty or allowing a free rein to the violence of the Lower Chamber and conforming in everything to its caprices." He then deputed the Duchess of Portsmouth to see what she could do to obtain better terms for him.

Profiting by the political embarrassments in which the King found himself, Louise de K roualle had soon succeeded in recovering her former ascendancy over Charles; for Madame de Mazarin knew little and cared less about English politics, and, now that he had been compelled to surrender Danby to the animosity of the Commons, Charles stood sorely in need of some one of whose fidelity to himself he was assured. The political situation, indeed, was a most complicated and dangerous one, and seldom had a king found himself in such desperate circumstances. With a crown stripped of most of its prerogatives and nearly all its wealth, he was called upon to struggle against a rich and powerful party, whose strength had been growing steadily ever since his restoration, backed by an infuriated people. And this party was clamouring for the exclusion of the rightful heir to the throne from the succession and threatening to proceed to extremities, if he endeavoured to thwart its demands.

If there was one thing outside his own ease and pleasure about which Charles had ever been in earnest, it was the question of the succession to the throne, for to permit the succession to be tampered with would be to confess himself utterly worsted in his struggle against the Parliament, and to encourage

it to reduce him to the most humiliating impotence during the remainder of his reign. Nevertheless, if the leaders of the Country party had been of one mind, they must in the end have forced the King to consent to the exclusion of the Duke of York and spared England the necessity for the Revolution of 1688.

But, while the wiser leaders of the party favoured the plan proposed by Temple, Essex and Halifax: to bring the Prince of Orange over to England during the prorogation of Parliament, to introduce him into the Council and to pave his way to the throne, Shaftesbury contemplated a very different course. He distrusted William as a mere adherent of the Royal House and as opposed to any weakening of the royal power or invasion of the royal prerogative, and had resolved to set aside the claims of James and his children and to place the Duke of Monmouth, Charles's reputed son by Lucy Walter, on the throne. "A bad title makes a good king," he is reported to have said; and he hoped to find in this young man a docile instrument of his ambition.

Monmouth was a sorry sort of champion to offer to the Protestants. Though not without natural gifts, he had been treated with such fatal indulgence by the King, whose favourite son he was, that his character had been ruined, and a more worthless and profligate young man it would have been difficult to find. At the same time, he joined to the good looks which he had inherited from his mother, a great charm of manner, and this, with a reputation for personal courage, made him very popular with the people;



JAMES SCOTT, DUKE OF MONMOUTH, K.G.
*From a photograph by Emery Walker, after the picture in the National
Portrait Gallery.*

and the more extreme section of the Country party, regardless of his birth, began to look upon him as a rival to the Romanist Duke of York. So conscious was James of this danger that, when leaving England just before the meeting of the last Parliament, he had exacted from Charles, in the presence of the Council, a solemn declaration of Monmouth's illegitimacy. But, notwithstanding this, the legend of the black box which was supposed to contain the contract of marriage between Charles and Lucy Walter held its ground; and the leniency with which Monmouth, in the early summer of 1679, treated the Covenanters of the West of Scotland, whose insurrection he had been sent to suppress—a leniency which was partly responsible for his recall—further strengthened his claim.

In this policy Shaftesbury was unsupported by any of his colleagues, save Russell. To Temple, Essex, or Halifax it seemed possible to bring about the succession of Mary without any violent revolution; but to set aside, not only the rights of James, but the rights of his Protestant children, and even of the Prince of Orange, in favour of a bastard, was to render a civil war inevitable.

Essex, an honest and able man, and the sincerity of whose Protestantism could not be doubted, joined with the cautious, sagacious Halifax, and the brilliant, dissolute Sunderland, in offering a resolute opposition to Shaftesbury's project, the success of which, they foresaw, would involve their own ruin. For they, with Temple, had advised the dissolution of the last Parliament, an action which had so enraged

Shaftesbury that he threatened that they should pay for it with their heads. Great, therefore, was their alarm when, towards the end of August, the Court being then at Windsor, the King was suddenly attacked by an illness—the result of a chill caught after playing tennis—which for a few days threatened to be fatal. Their consternation, indeed, was shared by moderate men of all shades of opinion, and not without good ground, since it was afterwards discovered that, if the King had died at Windsor, the Monmouth party were prepared for a *coup d'État*, and had arranged to seize the Tower, Dover Castle, and Portsmouth, and to arrest any one who should offer to proclaim James.

To counteract the designs of Shaftesbury and Monmouth, Halifax and Essex, with Charles's consent, secretly summoned the Duke of York from Brussels. He reached Windsor on September 2, and was received by the King with the most admirably feigned astonishment. But scarcely had he arrived, when the King's illness took a decided turn for the better, his physicians having, according to Barrillon, at length permitted him to take "the remedy of the Chevalier Talbor (*sic*), which is nothing else than quinine;" and it was thought advisable to quiet popular feeling by sending the duke out of the country again without delay. This time, however, he was allowed to go to Scotland, instead of to Brussels, to take command of the troops engaged in the suppression of the Covenanters, whom he treated with a cruelty which would alone have rendered his name odious to Protestants. At the same time, Charles deprived Monmouth of his charge of

Captain-General of the Forces and ordered him, like James, to leave the realm.

The King made steady progress towards recovery, and by the end of September, notwithstanding the opposition of his doctors, set out for Newmarket. Soon he had resumed all his old habits, but he does not seem to have recovered his full health or spirits, and in December one of the Verney family wrote: "The girls tell mee the King looks so very ill as it greeved them to see him, and came in twice, but spoke to none but my lord Fevarsome [Feversham], who came in with him; they never saw man have more discontent and disorder in his looks than the King had."*

Meantime, the secret negotiations with France had been continued, and Louise de K rouall , on Charles's behalf, had intimated to Barrillon that the sum offered by Louis XIV. was utterly inadequate for his Majesty's necessities and demanded a large annual subsidy. "I am seeing Madame de Portsmouth, to whom the King has confided all the negotiations," writes the Ambassador to his master. "She informs me that, if your Majesty is willing to give four million a year for four years, the King would be willing to enter into all the engagements that your Majesty would desire; but that, without this sum, it would be impossible for him not to assemble the Parliament. The King told me yesterday evening that he was ashamed and experienced a mortal displeasure at being reduced to drive a bargain with your Majesty."

The bargain, however, was not completed, Louis

* Letter cited by Mr. Osmund Airy, "Charles II."

being of opinion that, in all the circumstances, Charles was demanding far too much. He was alarmed at the hostile feeling of the English people towards France and anxious to delay the assembling of a new Parliament; but he feared that, after the recall of the Duke of York and the sending of Monmouth out of the kingdom, Charles would be obliged to conciliate the Country party by summoning Parliament within a reasonable time, and he therefore decided that it would be safer, and a good deal cheaper, to perpetuate the quarrel between the King and the Commons by continuing to subsidize the Opposition.

The attitude of Louise de K  roualle during the summer and autumn of 1679 was a somewhat singular one. Aware of the influence which she exercised over the King, all parties were naturally anxious to enlist her sympathies, and, since her object was to assure her own safety whichever ultimately triumphed, she appears to have coquetted with each in turn. "The Diary and Correspondence of Henry Sidney," afterwards Earl of Romney, who was a staunch supporter of the Prince of Orange, affords some interesting information concerning the lady's manoeuvres:

"June 21 [1679]—The Duchess of Portsmouth is mightily his [the Prince of Orange's] friend, and a great support to our party."

"June 22—We begin to be very apprehensive of the French Ambassador making some offer that might hinder the project of the guarantee: he was very busy with the Duchess of Portsmouth."

"June 26—Lord Halifax tells me that the Duchess of Portsmouth was unsatisfied with the Prince and desires me to advise him to write to her, for that she would be of great use to us against the Duke of Monmouth; and I am to let him know how instrumental she hath been in changing the Council and in several other things. In short, I am to tell him that she is one that Lord Sunderland does make use of, and that he must do so too, if he intends to do any good with the King.* She hath more power over him than can be imagined."

"June 27—At night, the Duchess of Portsmouth and I had some discourse together of Mr. Harbord [Mr. Harbord was a partisan of the Prince of Orange and in favour of the scheme for making William Protector of the Kingdom, in the event of the Duke of York's succession]. She said she did not like to make advances to Harbord. I told her I hoped she would receive them well, if they were made to her. She then fell to making several expressions of kindness to the Prince, and told me she believed he and several others loved her the worse, because they thought her too much in the interest of France. She confessed

* But, according to the Countess of Sunderland, it was the Duchess of Portsmouth who was making use of the Minister. In a letter to her friend Henry Sidney written in January, 1679, she expresses her fear that "that abominable jade"—as she styles the favourite—will end by seriously compromising her husband by her intrigues with France. The countess detested Louise, for in another of her letters to Henry Sidney she informs him that "the Duchess of Portsmouth is more of a jade than ever . . . to everybody and in every particular;" and in a third declares that the aforesaid lady "is so d—d a jade that it is but folly to hope [i.e. for her good offices on behalf of the Prince of Orange]; for she will certainly sell us, whenever she can, for £500,"

that she had so much kindness to her own country that she would be glad to do it any good, but, where it came into any competition with England, she would show that she thought her stake here was much greater than there."

"July 14—At my taking leave of the Duchess of Portsmouth, she said a great deal of her readiness to do the Prince any service."

"October 1—The Duchess, I find, is not well with the Prince, but extremely well with the Duke [of York]."

"November 17—When I took my leave of the Duchess of Portsmouth, she bade me tell the Prince that she was more his friend than he imagined. She is absolutely in with the Duke [of Monmouth]. Mrs. Wall loves him above all things:* he would have given her 500 guineas, but she refused it. All the Duke's servants are very elevated. This night there were great marks of joy and burning of a Pope, where there was 200,000 people."

The new election had not altered the complexion of the Parliament: indeed, thanks to the new tales of massacre and invasion with which Shaftesbury had been

* This Mrs. Wall was confidential servant to the Duchess of Portsmouth, and, consequently, a personage of considerable importance at the Court. Mr. Mountstevens, writing to Henry Sidney under date April 2, 1680, suggests to him the expediency of congratulating this lady upon her appointment to the post of laundress [*i.e.* keeper of the linen-closet] to the King, which her patroness had obtained for her.

busily feeding the constituencies, its members were even more violent than those of the House which had recently been dissolved. However, Charles had not failed to mark the breach which Shaftesbury's policy had made in the ranks of the Country party, and this, notwithstanding the failure of his financial negotiations with Louis XIV., emboldened him, not only to postpone the assembling of Parliament, which should have met in October, until January, 1680, but to remove the earl from the post of Lord President of the Council.

At midnight on November 27, Monmouth, though he had sought in vain to obtain the royal permission for his return, reappeared in London, where he was received with great popular rejoicings. The King refused to see him, dismissed him from his captaincy of the Guards and all his remaining offices, and ordered him to leave London at once. Nell Gwyn, who had always been on good terms with the duke and never forgot a friend, interceded for him, and "begg'd hard of his Majesty to see him, telling him he was grown pale, wan, lean, and long visaged, merely because he was in disfavour; but the King bid her be quiet, for he would not see him."*

Notwithstanding the paternal orders, Monmouth held his ground, though he quitted Whitehall for his own house in Hedge Lane, declaring that he would live on his wife's fortune. In the meantime, he made the most of his opportunities, worshipping at St.

* Verney Papers, cited by Mr. Wheatley, Introduction to Cunningham's *Nell Gwyn* (edit. 1903).

Martin's Church, so as to provoke public demonstrations of sympathy, and paying his court to Nell Gwyn, whose persuasions would, he believed, sooner or later, induce Charles to relent. "There is happening here," writes Barrillon, on December 14, to Louis XIV., "a thing which would appear very extraordinary in another country. The Duc de Monmouth sups almost every evening at Nelly's house; she is the actress by whom the King has two children and whom he goes to visit every day." And two days later the Countess of Sunderland writes to Henry Sidney: "He [Monmouth] pays great court to Nelly, and is shut up with her in her closet when the King comes, from which in time he expects great things."

Some persons affected to see in Nell Gwyn's efforts to reconcile Monmouth and the King a proof of her desire to identify herself closely with the Protestant movement. But it appears to have been merely the outcome of her good-nature, and the kindness with which she was afterwards treated by James II. is sufficient evidence that she had never used her influence with the King to prejudice him against his brother. Indeed, it is doubtful if she regarded Monmouth's extravagant ambitions very seriously, as she is said to have called him "Prince Perkin" to his face, and, when the duke replied that she was "ill-bred," to have smilingly inquired whether "Mrs. Barlow"* was any better bred.

Although Nell never lent herself to the intrigues of the Opposition, the London mob, nevertheless, seemed

* Mrs. Barlow was the name which Monmouth's mother, Lucy Walter, had assumed in her later years.

to have regarded her as one of the champions of the established faith, and spoke of her affectionately as "Protestant Nell." On the other hand, the Duchess of Portsmouth—or "Madame Carwell," as the people called her, being both a Papist and a Frenchwoman, was more unpopular than ever; indeed, with the single exception of the Duke of York, she was probably the best-hated individual in the three kingdoms. In the previous April she had been reflected upon by name in both Houses of Parliament, though no further steps had been taken against her; and towards the end of December, Barrillon informed Louis XIV. that he was given to understand that, when the new Parliament met, it was intended to demand her removal and that of Sunderland from the Court, and that it was quite probable that they would be brought to trial with Danby and the Catholic peers imprisoned in the Tower, and possibly condemned and executed.

The duchess appears to have been much alarmed, and, in the hope of conciliating her enemies, dismissed all her Roman Catholic servants; while there can be little doubt that she used all her influence with Charles to secure a further prorogation of the new Parliament. Any way, to the intense indignation of the Opposition, the King, instead of allowing Parliament to meet in January, prorogued to November, and, though bombarded with petitions to reconsider his decision from all over the country, which had been prepared in accordance with instructions from Shaftesbury's London office, he remained firm. "I look on myself," said he to the petitioners from London and Westminster, "as the head of the Government, and mean

to do what I think best for myself and my people ; ” while to the deputation from Berkshire, he observed with that urbanity which seldom failed to disarm resentment : “ We will argue the matter over a cup of ale when we meet at Windsor, though I wonder that my neighbours should meddle with my business.”

Charles’s firmness did not go unrewarded. The tide of opinion was already beginning to turn. The spell of the hideous imposture which had for so many months enslaved the nation had been broken by the acquittal, in the previous July, of Wakeman, the Queen’s physician, and others who had been indicted with him ; and, anxious as the people were for a Protestant sovereign, their sense of justice revolted against the monstrous wrong of setting aside James’s Protestant children to put the Crown of England on the head of a bastard. The stream of petitions which Shaftesbury had procured was answered by a counter-stream of addresses from thousands who declared their “ abhorrence ” of his plans against the Crown ; and the country was divided into two great factions of “ Petitioners ” and “ Abhorrrers,” the germs of the two great parties of “ Whigs ” and “ Tories.”

Profiting by the turn affairs were taking, Charles recalled the Duke of York ; and when, in consequence of this step, Essex, Russell and two other Whig leaders, requested permission to retire from the Council, accorded it “ with all his heart.” He also, although now reconciled to Monmouth, caused the declaration in which he solemnly denied that he had ever been married to any other woman than the Queen to be published.

Shaftesbury and Monmouth were not slow to retaliate. On June 26, 1680, Shaftesbury and other leaders of his party appeared before the Grand Jury of Middlesex at Westminster Hall, and "presented" James as a Popish recusant, and the Duchess of Portsmouth as "a common nuisance." The judges, however, managed to discharge the jury before either case came on; and the move was a failure. In August, Monmouth, doubtless at Shaftesbury's instigation, set out on a sort of quasi-royal progress through the south-western counties, where he was received with the utmost enthusiasm. On his return to London in October, he kept away from the Court, but appeared in the City on Lord Mayor's Day, and was welcomed with loud acclamations.

On October 21, 1680, the new Parliament at length met. The Opposition arrived at Westminster with French gold jingling in their pockets; for Louis XIV., irritated by Charles's attitude towards the Grand Alliance which William of Orange was building up against him, and by a treaty which England had recently concluded with Spain for resistance to France, had decided to support the Monmouth-Shaftesbury faction by profuse bribery, in which he included not only members of Parliament, but City merchants and the chief Presbyterian preachers.* "Separate the Parliament and the Court, stir up strife, sow division." Such were the instructions which Louis sent to Barrillon. So long as Charles and his Parliament were at logger-

* We learn from Barrillon's accounts, cited by M. Forneron, that from the early summer of 1680 up to the dissolution of Charles's third Parliament in January, 1681, Ralph Montagu received 50,000 livres; Hampden and Herbert 1,000 guineas each; while sums of 500 guineas were paid to Algernon Sidney and six other persons, and ten pocketed 300 guineas apiece.

heads, and the question of the Succession occupied the minds of the nation, he had nothing to fear from England.

It was observed at the opening of Parliament that Charles seemed in a very ill humour, a fact which may have been attributable to the conduct of the Duchess of Portsmouth, who had openly allied herself to Monmouth and Shaftesbury, and declared for exclusion. The Memoirs of James II. give the following explanation of this new move on the favourite's part :

"The Dutchesse of Portsmouth was frightened into a reconciliation, and did it so effectively as to become even a patron to her pretended prosecutors, to give them private meetings, particularly the Duke of Monmouth, and, in order to shew her new friends her zeal for their service, did all she could to enforce their counsels, which, were for removing the Duke from Court again, and assigned for a reason of her couldness to him that the Dutchesse [of York] had not shown her so much respect or markes of kindness as she thought her due : This was but a fresh excuse, the true motive was security and interest,* (which generally are the only idols such persons offer incense too) that influenced her in that affair ; for those generous principles of supporteing oppress'd innocency make but a weak impression upon persons of that character. Shaftesbury's cunning, therefore, on this occasion deceiv'd him not, tho hers did in the end, for he, by seeming to declare war against this mercenary woman, frightened her into an alliance with him against the Duke [of York], and she, haveing

* J. S. Clarke, "Life of James the Second, collected out of memoirs writ of his own hand" (1816).

the greatest influence over the King, was the enemy of all others that worked his Highness the greatest mischief."

Burnet asserts that she was induced to support the Exclusion Bill because she had been induced to believe that it would lead to her son, the Duke of Richmond, being declared the King's successor. "Her behaviour in this matter," he says, "was unaccountable: and the duke's behaviour to her afterwards looked liker an acknowledgment than a resentment. Many refined upon it, and thought she was set on as a decoy to keep the party up to the exclusion, that they might not hearken to the limitations. The duke was assured that the King would not grant the one: and so she was artificially managed to keep them from the other, to which the King would have consented, and of which the duke was most afraid. But this was too fine.* She was hearty for the exclusion: of which I had this particular account from Montagu, who, I believe, might be the person who laid the bait for her. It was proposed to her that, if she could bring the King to the exclusion, and to some other popular things, the Parliament would go next to prepare a bill for securing the King's person, in which a clause might be carried, that the King might declare the successor to the Crown, as had been done in Henry the Eighth's time. This would very much raise the King's authority, and would be no breach with the prince of Orange, but would rather oblige him to a greater dependence on the King. The Duke of

* "Many of James's letters," observes Mr. Osmund Airy, "prove that he was on very ill terms with her at the time, and looked upon her and her cabal as the most dangerous enemies he had."—Note to Burnet (Clarendon Press edition).

Monmouth would certainly be for this clause, since he could have no prospect any other way; and he would please himself with the hopes of being preferred by the King to any other person. But, since the lady Portsmouth found she was so absolutely the mistress of the King's spirit, she might reckon that, if such an act could be carried, the King would be prevailed on to declare her son his successor: yet it was suggested to her that, in order to the strengthening of her son's interest, she ought to treat for a match with the King of France's natural daughter, now the duchess of Bourbon. And thus the duke of Monmouth and she were brought to an agreement to carry on the exclusion, and that other act persueant to it: and they thought they were making tools of one another, to carry on their own ends. . . . Montagu assured me that she not only acted heartily in the matter, but she once drew the King to consent to it, if he might have had £800,000 for it, and that was afterwards brought down to £600,000. But the jealousies upon the King himself were such, that the managers in the house of commons durst not move for giving money till the bill of exclusion should pass, lest they should have lost their credit by such a motion: and the King would not trust them. So near was the point brought to an agreement, if Montagu told me true."

In his speech from the throne, Charles, in the hope of propitiating the Commons, bade them pursue those concerned in the "Popish Plot," although at the very time he was denouncing its absurdity to Reresby; and, with revolting cynicism, threw to them, as it were, the Catholic lords imprisoned in the Tower.* But,

* Mr. Osmond Airy, "Charles II."

at the same time, he made it abundantly clear that he would permit no tampering with the succession. His refusal roused the Commons, elected as they had been in the very heat of the panic and irritated by the long delay in calling them together, to fury ; and, after passing a series of violent resolutions, the Exclusion Bill was brought in and passed without a division (November 11). Four days later the bill was taken to the Lords by Russell, followed by most of the Commons and by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen.

So resolute was the temper of the Lower House, that in the Lords even Temple and Essex gave their support to the measure ; but Halifax stood firm, and his influence secured its rejection.

The exasperated Commons voted an address to the King demanding the dismissal of Halifax, whom they now hated even more than they had hated Danby. To which his Majesty blandly replied that "he doth not find the grounds in the Address of this House to be sufficient to induce him to remove the Earl of Halifax." He was resolved, as he told Reresby, never to part with any Minister at the request of either House. "My father," said he, "lost his head by that compliance, but, as for me, I will die another way."

The Commons were, however, allowed to have their way in regard to the imprisoned Catholic peers, and the old Lord Stafford * was solemnly brought to trial before the Lords. According to Reresby, the reason of his selection was that he was "deemed weaker than the other lords in the Tower and less able to labour

* William Howard, first Viscount Stafford, fifth son of Thomas, Earl of Arundel and Surrey.

his defence ;” while Burnet adds that he was “disliked even by his own relatives.” Charles was present throughout the whole of the proceedings ; while the Duchess of Portsmouth sat in the Hall chatting gaily with her new friends of the Opposition, who crowded round her to pay their court. Stafford made an unexpectedly courageous and able defence ; but it was to no purpose ; and, after one of the most shameful travesties of justice in English history, he was sentenced to death, his own relatives voting against him. The King, faithful to the cynical policy which he had followed from the beginning of the Plot of “leaving all to the laws,” refused once more to exercise his prerogative of mercy, except so far as to remit the hideous barbarities which at this period accompanied an execution for treason. Even this act of clemency was sufficient to evoke a fierce protest from the Commons, with which, it is to be noted, Russell associated himself. The mere death of this innocent old man was not sufficient to appease their ferocity ; they wanted him tortured as well.

It would seem that the Duchess of Portsmouth’s sympathy with the Whigs was more apparent than real, and that Shaftesbury had reason to suspect the sincerity of her professions. Any way, a few days after the trial of Stafford, the King being present, he fell upon the scandal of the duchess’s influence at Court in the course of a violent speech in the Lords, although, as he was well aware, this was a point upon which Charles was more likely to be sensitive than upon any other. “If,” said he, in answer to the criticisms of an opponent, “I must speak of them (*i.e.* the “chargeable”

ladies at Court), I shall say as the prophet did to King Saul: 'What meaneth the bleating of the cattle?' And I hope the King will return the same answer, that he reserves them for sacrifice, and means to deliver them up to please his people. For there must be, in plain English, my lords, a change. We must have neither Popish wife, nor Popish mistress, nor Popish councillor at Court, nor any new convert."

Such outrageous insolence as this must have been difficult for even the most easy-going of monarchs to endure; but at that moment Charles was more exercised over the fact that, though the Commons had been sitting for two months, they had not yet condescended to vote a single penny, and that there was "scarce bread for the King's family." On December 15 he reminded them of this omission, urging the want of funds for the preservation of Tangier. The Commons expressed their readiness to grant supply, conditional on his Majesty consenting to the Exclusion Bill. The King repeated his refusal to alter the succession, upon which the Commons passed a series of resolutions, reaffirming the necessity of the Duke of York's exclusion and their determination not to grant supply until the King agreed to it, and declaring all the advisers of the royal message to be "pernicious counsellors, promoters of Popery, and enemies of the King and the Kingdom."

The deadlock was complete, and once more Charles resolved upon a prorogation. The Commons, getting wind of his intentions, assembled in a state of fierce excitement (January 10) and were proceeding to pass further violent resolutions, when they were interrupted

by the arrival of Black Rod, to summon them to the Upper House, where Parliament was formally prorogued from the 10th to the 20th. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen petitioned that his Majesty would not only allow Parliament to meet upon the appointed day, but to continue sitting until it had secured religion and the safety of the kingdom. To which Charles replied by promptly transforming the prorogation into a dissolution (January 18).

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRIUMPH OF THE COURT

CHARLES followed up this blow by dismissing the leading Exclusionists from the Council, among them being the Duchess of Portsmouth's ally, Sunderland, who, after long opposing Shaftesbury, had ended by giving him his support, as had the favourite. Sunderland was punished with special severity, since, not only was he deprived of his post of Secretary of State, but he was not allowed to receive from his successor any part of the sum which, according to custom, he had paid for it. The King then announced that the next Parliament, which he had summoned for March 21, would meet not at Westminster, but at Oxford. By this sagacious move he intended, not only to remove the session from London, where Shaftesbury and the Whigs were supreme, to a town remarkable for its loyalty to the Crown, but, by reviving memories of the Great Rebellion, to frighten the country into reaction by the dread of civil war. A deputation from the House of Lords, headed by Shaftesbury and Essex, waited upon the King to protest against this change

of venue, but were coldly informed by his Majesty that he regarded their petition "only as the opinion of so many men."

It was certain that Charles would not have acted thus boldly had not he once more contrived to render himself independent of the assistance of Parliament. The session of 1680 had made it clear to Louis XIV. that nothing could permanently oppose the course of the national hatred against France, for, notwithstanding the bribes which Barrillon had so freely distributed among the Opposition, expressions of the bitterest hostility were constantly finding their way into the speeches and resolutions of the Commons. He had therefore decided that it would be more advisable to support Charles against the Parliament than the Parliament against Charles, and in November, 1680, the negotiations which had fallen through in the previous year were resumed. On this occasion, it was Louis who made the first overtures, through Barrillon; but Charles had not forgotten the manner in which his brother monarch had received his almost pathetic appeal for assistance fourteen months before, and the hard bargain which, presuming on his necessities, he had tried to drive with him, and he was resolved to make his own terms. To the surprise and mortification of Louis, he hung back, and it was not until some weeks later, on the eve of the dissolution of his third Parliament, that he informed Barrillon that he was willing to consider his master's proposals. Even then he did not appear to be in any particular hurry to come to terms; and, by skilfully prolonging the negotiations, finally managed to extract from Louis

a promise of a subsidy of two million livres for the next two years, and four hundred thousand crowns for each of the two succeeding years, in return for which he pledged himself to disengage himself gradually from the Spanish alliance and to resist any attempt on the part of the Parliament to drive him into war with France. This agreement was unwritten, and no one but the Treasurer, Lawrence Hyde, Clarendon's younger son, was allowed to share the secret. For, though, since Shaftesbury's attack upon her in the House of Lords, the Duchess of Portsmouth had terminated her short-lived alliance with the Whigs, she had apparently not yet recovered Charles's full confidence. His affection she had never lost, which is a strong argument in favour of the supposition that fear rather than interest had caused her to side with the Exclusionists.

The subsidy promised him by Louis rendered Charles independent of Parliamentary aids for at least two years, and feeling that he could now afford to stand firm against the Exclusion Bill or any other unacceptable demand of his faithful Commons, and continue his old game of "kicking them from one stair to another" until his funds were exhausted, he repaired to Oxford with a light heart and a determination to carry matters with a high hand. The courtiers, unaware that the royal coffers would shortly be bursting with French gold, wondered to see the King so gay, for Shaftesbury had so skilfully engineered the elections that a House had been returned even more prepared to go to extreme lengths than the last. It looked, indeed, very much like the beginning

of civil war, for Charles had considered it advisable to bring a strong detachment of troops with him—in order to encourage this belief, according to some authorities, though others affirm that there was a plot on foot to kidnap the King, carry him back to London and make terms with him there—and Shaftesbury and the other Whig leaders arrived accompanied by bands of armed retainers, with blue bows and ribbons inscribed with “No Popery!” “No Slavery!” in their hats. Since the days of the Civil War, when the first Charles had held his Court at Oxford, the grey old city had had no such invaders of its ancient peace.

The King arrived on March 14, and met with a reception which must have assured him that, whatever the sentiments of the town, the University was as loyal as it had been in his father's time.

“All the way the King passed,” writes one eyewitness, “were such shoutings, acclamations and ringing of bells, made by loyal hearts and smart lads of the layetie of Oxon, that the aire was so pierced that the clouds seemed to divide. The general cry was ‘Long live King Charles!’ and many, drawing up to the very coach-window, cried, ‘Let the King live, and the devill hang up all roundheads’; at which his Majestie smiled and seemed well pleased. The throng and violence of the people to express their affection were such that the coach was scarce able to pass. The youths were all on fire. . . . Their hats did continually fly, and seriouslie had you been there, you would have thought that they would have thrown away their verie heads and leggs. Here was an arm

for joy flung out, and there a legg displaced, but by what art they ever found their way back let the R. S.* telle you. . . . At the King's comming into the most spacious quadrangle of Christ Church, what by the shouts and the melodious ringing of the ten statelie bells there, the college sounded and the buildings did learn from its scholars to echo forth his Majestie's welcome. You might have heard it ring againe and againe: 'Welcome! welcome!! thrice welcome!! Charles the great!'

"After nine at night were bonfires made in several streets, wherein were only wanting rumps and cropt eares to make the flame burne merrily; and at some were tables of refection erected by our burning youths, who, being e'en mad with joy, forced all that passed by to carouse on their knees a health to their beloved Charles."†

The King and Court took up their residence at Christ Church; Shaftesbury found rooms at Balliol, to which college, on leaving, he presented a handsome gift of plate, in recognition of the hospitality he had received; while Monmouth, who arrived on the 22nd, "with thirty persons in attendance, as well servants as gentlemen,"‡ lodged at the house of Alderman Wright, the leader of the Oxford Whigs.

Both the Duchess of Portsmouth and Nell Gwyn had accompanied the King to Oxford. The story goes that one day the latter, while driving through the town in one of the royal coaches, encountered a

* The Royal Society.

† "The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary of Oxford, 1632-1695."

‡ Ibid.

mob of Whig sympathizers, who, mistaking her for the Catholic mistress, began to hoot and pelt her. Upon which Nell, putting her pretty, impudent face out of the window, cried: "Pray, good people, be civil; I am the Protestant ——!" And the rabble, laughing and cheering, made way for the coach to pass.

On March 21st, 1681, the shortest-lived of all English Parliaments—shorter by a fortnight than the Short Parliament of Charles I.—was opened by the King in an admirable speech, which, if somewhat threatening, was dignified and reasonable. Having informed his hearers that he had dissolved the last Parliament, because "he, who would never use arbitrary government himself, was resolved not to suffer it in others," and pointed out that "his summoning them to assemble so soon was a proof that the irregularity of their proceedings had not made him out of love with them," he declared that he intended to adhere to the determination he had so often expressed to maintain the succession inviolate. At the same time, if means could be found which, in the event of the succession of the Duke of York, would ensure the administration of the government remaining in Protestant hands, he would be most willing to consider any such expedient. And Halifax, in the Lords, brought forward a proposal that James should be King in name only, the actual functions of government to be vested in the Prince of Orange, acting on behalf of his wife.

Whether the King and Halifax were acting in good faith, or whether this compromise was suggested merely

with the object of inviting rejection and thus putting the Opposition wholly in the wrong, matters little. Its refusal was, from the strategical point of view, a signal blunder, in either case. "It is hardly too much to say, indeed," observed one of Shaftesbury's biographers, "that pure patriotism could not have chosen but to consider it, and that nothing but sheer faction could, in the course of a short debate, have unconditionally rejected it." Such, however, was its actual fate, and there can scarcely be a doubt that the refusal of the House of Commons to entertain Halifax's "expedient," and their immediate resolution to reintroduce the Exclusion Bill, had the effect of confirming all men of moderate views in the opinion that Shaftesbury's object was not so much the exclusion of the Duke of York as the elevation of Monmouth, and that he was aiming less at the protection of the Protestant religion than at the attainment of the position of Mayor-of-the-Palace to a King of his own making.*

Had they known what we know to-day, on the excellent authority of Barrillon, they would have had still less doubt on that point. The Ambassador, in a despatch dated March 28, reported that two days earlier in the House of Lords, before formal discussion had begun, Shaftesbury approached the King and handed him a letter which, he said, had been addressed to him anonymously. The effect of this letter was that the King should at once declare Monmouth his successor. Charles repeated that nothing should induce him to take a resolution so contrary to

* H. D. Traill, "Shaftesbury."

all law and justice. Shaftesbury rejoined that, if the King were only restrained by law and justice, he might leave the matter to himself and his friends, and "they would make laws which would give legality to a step so necessary for the quiet of the whole nation and by which great calamities might be avoided." "To which," writes Barrillon, "the King of England made answer: 'My Lord, let there be no self-deception. I will never yield, and will not let myself be intimidated. Men become ordinarily more timid as they grow old; as for me, I shall be, on the contrary, bolder and firmer; and I will not stain my life and reputation in the little time that perhaps remains to me to live. I fear not the dangers and calamities with which people try to frighten me. I have the law and reason on my side. Good men will be with me. There is the Church' (pointing to the bishops), 'which will remain united with me. Believe me, my Lord, we shall not be divided, and I hope that soon there will be none but poor creatures and knaves to support a measure without any good foundation.'"

It is very possible, as Traill suggests, that this dialogue may have been embellished by Barrillon's informant. But even if that be so, the Ambassador's despatch is, nevertheless, good evidence that Shaftesbury pressed Monmouth on the King, in a private conversation on the very day on which Halifax's "expedient" was discussed in the Lords, and that Charles, "who had shown by his acceptance of this proposal that he had no particular tenderness for James's personal claims, did really feel in this matter

that conscientious scruple which was with him the last survival of a moral sense."

It was not only by their attitude on the Succession Question that the House of Commons continued to alienate the sympathies of their more prudent fellow-countrymen. Even in this one week of the session, they found other occasions to demonstrate the arbitrary and factious spirit which animated them ; and their attempt to revive the waning panic by impeaching a man named Fitzharris before the House of Lords, in defiance of the constitutional rule which entitled him to a trial by his peers in the course of common law, did still more to influence public opinion on the side of the Crown. Their course, indeed, seems to have been based wholly on a belief that the penury of the Treasury left Charles at their mercy, and that a refusal of supplies must wring from him his assent to the Exclusion. But Louis's gold had freed the King from any dependence on their assistance. He wanted no money from them ; he believed that, however high-handed his treatment of them, he would now have the support of the great mass of the nation, as a Sovereign whose patience and conciliatory temper had been rewarded with nothing but insult and violence. There was everything to induce him to make short work of them, and nothing whatever to deter him. He determined to strike at once.

As usual, he dissimulated his intention to the last moment, so as to give a dramatic touch to the proceedings and render the blow the more effective ; and, having received on Sunday, the 27th, a complaint from the Commons that they were seriously incommoded in the Geometry School for want of room, gave orders

for the theatre to be prepared for their occupation by the following Tuesday. But on Sunday afternoon he held a Cabinet Council at Merton, where the Lord Chancellor, who was a little unwell, was lodged, "and there the dissolution of Parliament was resolved on, and there was not one false or babbling member."* The same night, his coach was quietly sent a stage out of Oxford, accompanied by a guard of horse, to await his coming.

Early on Monday morning, the King went down in a sedan-chair to the Hall of Christ Church, where the Lords were sitting, followed by another sedan-chair, which was supposed to contain a lord-in-waiting. What it really contained was his robes of state. Hastily putting them on, he seated himself on the throne, and, without giving the Lords time for their customary robing, ordered the Commons to be summoned. He knew that they would come in the firm belief that, under the pressure of his supposed financial necessities, he was about to announce his surrender, and the thought of how rudely he was about to undeceive them must have diverted him immensely as he sat there in his gorgeous robes, awaiting the arrival of his victims. But let us allow Charles's fervid admirer, Thomas Bruce, to describe the scene which followed :

"About eleven, I went to Christ Church, the Parliament sitting in great rooms within the precincts of the College. I met a friend of mine that told me the King was sitting on his throne, and with his robes and crown, and, for the more secrecy, the peers had no notice given them to put on their robes. I went into the House

* "Memoirs of Thomas Bruce, Earl of Ailesbury."

by the door next the canopy, and the King gave me a most gracious smile, and I never saw him with such a cheerful countenance.

“The King expected the Speaker and the Commons. I retired into the corner at the end of the Bishops’ Bench next the bar, though, according to formes, as a member I ought to have been within the bar. The door by which the Speaker was to enter was very straight, and three steps to enter, which prolonged the time much, and they got in beside with great difficulty. The Speaker came to the bar, with my Lord Russell on his right and my Lord Cavendish on his left. The crowd was such, and the noise so loud, that the first Serjeant-at-Arms cried out three times : ‘ Silence in the King’s name ! ’

“The King ordered my Lord Chancellor Finch to do his duty ; on which he declared in the usual manner that the Parliament should be dissolved. I was witness of the dreadful faces of the members and their loud sighs. I went up the House to attend the King at the putting off of his robes, and, with a most pleasing and cheerful countenance, he touched me on the shoulder, with this expression : ‘ I am now a better man than you were a quarter of an hour since ; you had better have one King than five hundred,*’ and bade us all go to our houses and stay there until further orders. . . . In appearance, he dined in public and with music, as the other days, but ’twas a breakfast rather ; and sitting a

* Some verses found among Anthony Wood’s MSS. express the same opinion :
Under 500 Kings three Kingdoms grone,
Goe, Finch [the Lord Chancellor], desolve them, Charles is on the throne,
And by the grace of God will reigne alone.

very short time, and retiring into a room, he went privately down a back stairs and slipped into Sir Edward Seymour's coach (and there was not so much as one in his livery or guards that were posted on the road); and the next Monday he came to Whitehall."*

The Lords did not immediately disperse when the King left the House. Shaftesbury gathered his supporters around him, under the pretence of signing a protest, and proposed that they should continue to sit in defiance of the dissolution. He even sent messengers to the Commons to exhort them to a like boldness. But when they reflected that Charles had a considerable body of troops about Oxford, their lordships began to fear—to use Lord Grey's expression—that "if they did not disperse, the King would come and pull them out by the ears;" and one by one they slunk away, until the House was deserted.

It was at once apparent that Charles had won a complete victory and that the Succession was saved. The hideous edifice of fraud and blood which Oates and his accomplices had reared was already tottering to its fall; and the bulk of the nation, ashamed and disgusted at its folly, turned savagely upon the unscrupulous politicians, who, for their own ends, had not hesitated to stimulate those miscreants' perjuries, and, in their efforts to intimidate the King into accepting a bastard as his heir, had dragged the country almost to the verge of another civil war. A cleverly-worded declaration issued by Charles on April 8, in which he recounted the misdeeds of the Parliament and his own manifold virtues and appealed to the justice of his people, was answered

* "Memoirs of Thomas Bruce, Earl of Ailesbury."

by an almost universal burst of loyalty. The Church rallied to the King ; his declaration was read from every pulpit ; the Universities declared that he reigned by " a fundamental hereditary right, which no religion, no law, no fault, no forfeiture could alter or diminish," and throughout the summer addresses couched in the most slavish language kept pouring in. By July, Charles felt strong enough to have Shaftesbury arrested and brought to trial on a charge of suborning witnesses to the Plot. But London was still true to the Whig leader ; the Middlesex Grand Jury threw out the bill, and his release was hailed with bonfires and the ringing of bells.

However, if Shaftesbury were still strong in London, in the provinces his influence had received a mortal blow ; and so, feeling that he had thoroughly earned a holiday, at the beginning of September, the King set out for Newmarket.

CHAPTER XVIII

LE ROI S'AMUSE

THERE had been no Spring race-meeting at Newmarket that year, and, perhaps on that account, the little town was even more than usually crowded. All the leading patrons of the Turf were there, and what with horse and foot-races, hawking and cock-fighting, to say nothing of other pleasures, which were not peculiar to Newmarket, they seem to have had a right merry time. "His Majesty being arrived there," says *The Domestick Intelligencer*, "after dinner was diverted with a match of cock-fighting, upon which many of the Court lay'd great wagers, and 'tis said that his Majesty was pleased to bet several guineas; after that a foot-race was run between a country-fellow and a foot-man, there being great odds laid upon the head of the latter, yet, notwithstanding that he was a clever and well-made person, and the countryman so very heavy and cumbersome, the countryman won the race by about 40 yards, to the great admiration of all present. The evening was spent in heats and breathings of several horses, in order to prepare them for the great races that were to be run there."

Charles's enjoyment of the pleasures of Newmarket had not diminished with the years. "The King," writes Reresby, "was so much pleased with the country, and so great a lover of the diversions which that place did afford, that he let himself down from Majesty to the very degree of a country-gentleman. He mixed himself amongst the crowd, allowed every man to speak to him that pleased; went a-hawking in the mornings, to cock-matches in the afternoons (if there were no horse-races), and to plays in the evenings, acted in a barn, and by very ordinary Bartolemew fair comedians." Lord Conway, who had succeeded Sunderland as Secretary, was in attendance; but he appears to have found it no easy matter to persuade the King to attend to any State matters; indeed, if we are to credit what he wrote to Sir Leoline Jenkins, at Whitehall, business had to take its chance when his Majesty was in bed; and if it were not transacted in these circumstances, it had to be deferred altogether. In fairness to Charles, however, it should be mentioned that gossip affirms that, during much of the time that he was at Newmarket, my Lord was in so mellow a condition that he could scarcely have ventured to wait upon his Sovereign.

Both the Duchess of Portsmouth and Nell Gwyn were likewise in attendance on his Majesty. The latter, during her visits to the headquarters of the Turf, was not honoured with apartments in the palace, but usually occupied an adjoining house which Charles had bought for her, and where he paid her frequent visits. Mr. Hore, in his "History of Newmarket," says that, according to a local tradition, there was an underground passage between the palace and Nell's

house in those times. "It is," he adds, "even now alleged that a portion of it may still be traced leading from Mr. Leopold de Rothschild's house to the 'Rutland Arms.'"

If any such secret means of communication did really exist, it would seem to have been a wholly unnecessary precaution, since, although Charles may have desired to conceal the frequency of his visits to Nell from the inhabitants of Newmarket, that lively lady had not the smallest scruple about proclaiming their relationship to the world, whereby during this same autumn meeting she greatly scandalized the Mayor and Aldermen of Oxford, who had come to present a petition to the King.

The Corporation of Oxford was as aggressively Whig as the University was violently Tory, and the leading spirit of the deputation, a certain Alderman Wright, had been Monmouth's host during the Parliament which had recently been dissolved. Nor was the object of their visit one that was likely to commend them to the King, it being to pray that his Majesty would be graciously pleased to confirm the nomination of a certain Thomas Prince—a most rabid partisan of Shaftesbury—to the office of town clerk. For two or three days they hung about, waiting for some member of the Court to present them to the King, which no one seemed disposed to do. At length, growing desperate, they resolved to lie in wait for Charles on the Heath, where they somewhat unceremoniously presented their petition. The King promised to consider it; but the "Black Guard," that is to say, the linkmen, scullions and other menials of the Court, who



NELL GWYN

From a mezzotint engraving by J. Beckel, after a painting by Verrhells.

had gathered to see the racing, angry at their presumption, "treated them very rudely, calling them Presbyterian petitioners and Whiggish dogs, and saluted them with stones and dirt."* Indeed, but for the appearance of Nell Gwyn, whose arrival upon the scene caused a diversion, they would have been very roughly handled. Subsequently, the King informed them, through Lord Conway, that Mr. Thomas Prince did not meet with his approval, "to which they answered that they were very sorry for it, and so went away."†

The mortified civic dignitaries returned to Oxford in a very ill humour with the King, which was not diminished, when, the story of their adventures having got abroad, ribald undergraduates made game of them in the streets. The pompous Alderman Wright, who appears to have been the favourite butt of the scholars' wit, was particularly envenomed against his Majesty, with whose "goings on" he professed to be unutterably shocked. "Alderman Wright, lately goeing before Brazen Nose Coll.," writes Dr. Prideaux to John Ellis, "a fresh man came out, and spying him past by, called out: 'Run, Alderman, run! The Black Guard are comeing,' which put the Alderman into so violent a passion that he was scarcely himself all that day. Wherever he comes, he speaks scurrulously of the King. It seems when y^e Alderman was at Newmarket with his petition, the King, walking in the feilds [*i.e.* on the Heath], met Nel Gwyn, and Nel cald to him: 'Charles, I hope I shall have your

* "Letters of Humphrey Prideaux, Dean of Norwich, to John Ellis, Under-Secretary of State, 1674-1722."

† Ibid.

company at night, shall I not ?' With this story the Alderman makes a great deal of worke wherever he comes. He says that he had often heard bad things of the King, but now his own eyes have seen it."*

Nell Gwyn no doubt enjoyed her visit to Newmarket, but it may be doubted whether the Duchess of Portsmouth did. Her Grace was, indeed, very much exercised in her mind just then about the turn which political events had taken, and the influence they were likely to have upon her future prospects. Since his serious illness in 1679, Charles had never been quite the same man ; and she did not believe that he would live many years. And what would happen to her in the event of the King's death ?

She ought, of course, to have been a wealthy woman, but she had been so recklessly extravagant that the immense sums which she had received had been for the most part frittered away, and she was, besides, deeply in debt. From James, when he should come to the throne, she could expect nothing, for he was reported to be greatly incensed against her by her intrigues with the Exclusionists ; nor, if, under his rule, the Whigs should again be in the ascendant, could she look for any consideration at their hands, since they were not likely to forget that she had abandoned their cause at a critical moment. Altogether, the outlook was most unpromising, and she felt that it behoved her to take measures to assure herself an adequate provision for the future with the least possible delay.

* " Letters of Humphrey Prideaux, Dean of Norwich, to John Ellis, Under-Secretary of State, 1674-1722."

With this object, she bombarded the King with entreaties, until she had extracted from him a promise that she should be fully provided for. But to do this was no easy matter, for the most rigid economy barely sufficed to carry on the government ; and Charles did not wish to summon another Parliament, lest he should forfeit Louis's subsidy ; for, now that the question of the Succession was disposed of, the Parliament would be certain to turn its attention to the aggressions of that potentate. At length, however, the favourite suggested to him a way out of the difficulty.

The Duke of York was still an exile in Scotland, to which he had returned shortly before the opening of the Parliament of 1680 ; and, to his profound disgust, since he heartily disliked the country and sighed for the pleasures of London, his return seemed likely to be postponed indefinitely. For Halifax had warned the King that to recall the duke so long as he professed himself a Catholic would be to forfeit his present popularity, and in August, 1681, Charles had despatched Hyde to Edinburgh, to inform his brother that he could not permit him to return to England unless he would consent to conform, at least outwardly, to the Established Church. The Duchess of Portsmouth, however, succeeded in persuading the King to consent to James's return, in consideration of his agreeing to settle upon her £5,000 a year out of the Post Office revenues enjoyed by him, which sum was to be made up to the duke out of the Excise ; and Charles invited his brother to join him at Newmarket, at the Spring Meeting of 1682, to make the necessary arrangements. James was aware that this scheme could not be carried

out without the consent of Parliament, but he kept this knowledge to himself, until he had come to Newmarket and obtained the King's consent to fixing his residence in England ; and the following summer found him once more at St. James's Palace. As Charles had no intention of summoning another Parliament the little arrangement fell through ; but, the Duchess of Portsmouth having learned of the French subsidy, he was obliged to console her for her disappointment by allocating for her benefit £10,000 out of each quarterly payment, until she should have received a total sum of £100,000. At the time of the King's death only one instalment remained to be paid.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH VISITS FRANCE

THE Duchess of Portsmouth was not at Newmarket when the meeting between the royal brothers took place. In the first days of March she had embarked at Greenwich on the royal yacht, and sailed for the country of her birth, which she had not seen for nearly twelve years. Her enemies persisted in representing her departure as a final one;* but, in point of fact, it was merely intended to be a visit of a few months' duration. "She wished to appear at the Court of France in the splendour of her rank of favourite. She wished to recount herself to Louis XIV. all that she had done to bring about the indissoluble union of the two nations. It is the hour of her pride and of her splendour, the hour of her triumph in the midst of the Frenchwomen who had known her poor and humble."†

It may seem at first sight a little strange that the duchess should have thought it safe to quit the side of so very susceptible a monarch as Charles II., even

* "The enemies of Madame de Portsmouth announce that she has gone to France to return no more."—Barrillon to Louis XIV., March 16, 1682.

† Forneron, *Louise de Kéroualle, Duchesse de Portsmouth*.

for a few months. She had, however, satisfied herself that she had no longer any rival to fear. For the King's infatuation for Madame de Mazarin had not lasted very long. It had been from the beginning merely a physical attraction, and now that Charles was no longer young, and his health was no longer what it had once been, something more than physical charms were required to obtain any permanent influence over him. And, besides, the seductive Italian was unfortunately unable to accord her royal admirer more than a share of her affections. So irresistible were her charms that her position as King's favourite did not prevent her from becoming the object of the most passionate and romantic adoration, and she was besieged by *soupirants*. There was the Portuguese Ambassador, Dom Luis de Vasconcellos, who loved her so blindly, we are told, that he appeared to be quite unaware that his infatuation had made him the laughing-stock of both Court and town; there was Ralph Montagu, who neglected for her sake the political intrigues in which he was risking his head;* and there was the Prince of Monaco, one of her old friends of Savoy, who, having come to London with the intention of staying a few days, remained for two years, "absorbed by his devotion."

With this last admirer the duchess fell in love, and all the remonstrances of her political friends availed nothing against the dictates of her heart. Saint-Évremond, in a *Discours sur l'Amitié*, hazarded some counsels which were intended to apply to her. "What," wrote he, "might

* "Mr. Montagu goes no more to Madam Mazarin's," wrote the Countess of Sunderland to Henry Sidney. "The town says he is forbid; whether his love or his politics were too pressing I know not."

not Madame de Chevreuse, the Countess of Carlisle, and the Princess Palatine have achieved, if they had not spoiled by their hearts all that their intelligence might have accomplished?" It was the same with Madame de Mazarin. All the hopes which the enemies of the Duchess of Portsmouth had based upon the Italian's conquest of the King were rudely dashed to the ground. For the *liaison* caused so much talk that it soon reached Charles's ears, and, in high dudgeon, since, easy-going as he was, he was not prepared to tolerate another Duchess of Cleveland, he stopped the lady's pension and treated her with marked coldness. After a few weeks, he relented so far as to restore the pension; and, indeed, he could hardly in justice have refused to do so, since, owing apparently to the reports which had reached him concerning his wife's relations with the King of England, M. de Mazarin had discontinued his.* But, though a little later, the intimacy was resumed, his Majesty's attentions were henceforth of an intermittent character, and no longer caused the Duchess of Portsmouth any uneasiness.

* M. de Mazarin appears to have been under the impression that the pension which the King was paying his wife was in the form of a loan, for which he himself might be made responsible, since Saint-Évremond tells us that he despatched an emissary to England to represent to him that his wife's receipts were valueless. To which Charles replied, laughing, that that was a matter which troubled him not at all, since he never took any. It would appear, however, that he would not have been sorry if the expenses of the lady's maintenance could have been shared with her husband, for in February, 1682, we find Barrillon writing to Louis XIV.: "He [the King] has charged me this morning to supplicate your Majesty, on his behalf, and to inform him, that he will be doing him [Charles] a sensible favour by consenting to interpose his authority, and to make M. de Mazarin continue to pay his wife the pension which he promised her, and the payment of which he has discontinued for two years past."

The favourite of Charles II. had no reason to complain of the reception which awaited her in France. "There was nothing to equal the welcome which she received," writes Saint-Simon, and he relates how when she went one feast-day to visit the Capuchin convent in the Rue Saint-Honoré, "these poor monks, who had been warned of her coming, sallied forth in procession to meet her, with the cross, holy water and incense. They received her as though she had been the Queen and threw her into a strange confusion." The gratified sultana did not fail to inform her friends in England of her triumphs, and Charles II. hastened to acquaint Louis XIV., through Barrillon, how deeply sensible he was of "the receptions and the honours accorded to Madame de Portsmouth."

At the end of April, the duchess left Saint-Cloud, where the French Court then was, for her estate of Aubigny, in Berry, where she spent some days. Then she proceeded to Bourbon-les-Bains, where she passed the remainder of May and the first part of June with her sister, Lady Pembroke, and from the waters of which her health derived considerable benefit. From Bourbon she would appear to have gone to Brittany, on a visit to her parents; but the middle of July saw her again at the Court, basking in the smiles of the monarch whom she had served so well, and arousing the envy and admiration of the ladies by the magnificence of her toilettes.

Finally, towards the end of July, she returned to Whitehall, where Charles received her with open arms, in the literal as well as the figurative sense of the expression, for Barrillon reported that "she appeared to have more credit and consideration than she had yet enjoyed."

Charles busied himself in bringing about a reconciliation between her and the Duke of York, which he effected, according to Burnet, by assuring his brother that the intrigues in which the lady had engaged during the contest over the Exclusion Bill had been in compliance with his orders, "so that she might gain the confidence of Shaftesbury and his partisans and betray their designs to him. The duke," adds the historian, "saw it was necessary to believe this or at least to seem to believe it."

James was wise, for the consideration with which the favourite had been treated by Louis XIV. had, so to speak, consecrated her position, which was henceforth practically unassailable. Conscious of this, she became haughtier than ever, and those who ventured to criticize her had cause to regret it. Thus, on its being reported to her that the Dutch Ambassador, Vanbeuninghen, had been so ill-advised as "to exaggerate the familiarity" between her and Barrillon, and to observe that the access which she permitted the latter at all hours "marked a confidence and an intimacy between them which could not fail to be mortifying to the allies of the King of England," she complained to Charles that he had failed in respect towards her. The King made strong representations to Vanbeuninghen, who was obliged to ask pardon and "to give all the explanations necessary of the sincerity of his intentions and of his unwillingness to fail in any way in respect towards a lady for whom his Britannic Majesty showed so much consideration." After which he went in person to make the *amende honorable* to the Duchess of Portsmouth.*

* Barrillon to Louis XIV., July 27, 1682.

Catherine of Braganza herself was obliged to enforce respect for her husband's mistress among the ladies of her entourage, the younger of whom were naturally inclined to let their tongues wag a little freely. One day, the favourite waited upon the Queen to complain that she had learned from Lady Conway that Miss Temple, one of her Majesty's maids-of-honour, had permitted herself to indulge in some disrespectful observations concerning her. The Queen immediately sent for the delinquent, rated her soundly, and, to punish her the more effectively, deprived her of her salary.

Charles, like his mistress, had no longer any opposition to fear. At Midsummer, 1682, he contrived, by trickery, to secure the election of Tory sheriffs for London, and the juries they packed left the life of every Exclusionist at the mercy of the Crown. Shaftesbury, aware that he was marked out for destruction, for there was no chance of his getting another *ignoramus* from a Grand Jury, or even a fair trial, plunged madly into conspiracies with a handful of adventurers as desperate as himself, hid himself in the City, and called upon his friends to rise in insurrection. But the measures he advocated were discountenanced by the other leaders of his party, and in November he fled to Holland, where two months later his restless spirit found peace in death. He died a bitterly-disappointed man, with the knowledge that by his violent and unscrupulous tactics he had wrecked his own and his party's fortunes. Nevertheless, had he lived a few years longer, he would have witnessed the triumph of whatever was worthy to triumph in his political principles.

Despite the disappearance of Shaftesbury from the scene, the Whig leaders still believed opposition possible; and Monmouth, with Essex, Russell, Lord Howard of Ettrick, Grey, Hampden and Algernon Sidney, held meetings with the object of founding an association whose agitation should force the King to summon a Parliament. But the more desperate spirits went much further, and a group of old Fifth Monarchy men, with whom Shaftesbury had been closely connected, formed a plan to kidnap—or to assassinate—both the King and the Duke of York, as they passed the Rye House, on their road from Newmarket to London, in June, 1683. The plot would in all probability have succeeded, but for a fortunate accident. A fire broke out at the royal palace at Newmarket and burned it to the ground; and this caused Charles to return to London some days earlier than he had intended.

The conspirators were betrayed and arrested, and the investigations which followed led to the arrest of Essex, Russell, Hampden, Sidney, and Howard of Ettrick; Grey contrived to effect his escape, while Monmouth was allowed to hide himself. Howard turned King's evidence and revealed all that he knew, and more than he knew, of the consultations and objects of his friends. Although the project which they had meditated was wholly distinct from the other, the unscrupulous ingenuity of the Crown lawyers found little difficulty in blending them into one. Russell, notwithstanding that there was but one witness against him, as there had been against the innocent Stafford—the victim of himself and his

political friends—was convicted of treason and executed in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Charles refusing all applications for his pardon, even from the Duchess of Portsmouth, who had been offered a large sum for successful intervention. Algernon Sidney shared his fate, a manuscript treatise in which he had advocated the advantages of Republicanism being allowed by the infamous Jeffreys, now Chief Justice, to take the place of a second witness. Essex died by his own hand in the Tower on the same day on which Russell was condemned. The Nemesis of the Popish Plot had pursued the Whig leaders. They had taken up the sword of injustice to serve their political ends; and they perished by it.

Thus, the running fight between the Crown and Parliament ended in a complete victory for the former, and the Constitutional opposition which had held Charles so long in check lay prostrate at his feet. What little strength remained to the Country party lay chiefly in the towns, and these were now attacked by writs of "*quo warranto*," which called on them to show cause why their charters should not be declared forfeited on the ground of abuse of their privileges. A few verdicts in favour of the Crown were followed by a general surrender of municipal liberties; and a grant of fresh charters, in which all but Royalists of the most uncompromising type were excluded from the corporations, placed the representation of the boroughs in the hands of the Crown.

It was now generally believed that a Parliament would be summoned, for the elections could not have failed to result in an enormous majority for the Court;

indeed, in Burnet's opinion, very few of the opposite party would have had the courage to offer themselves as candidates. But, though Halifax counselled this step, Charles declined to call another Parliament. His refusal was mainly due to the representations of his paymaster at Versailles, backed by the influence of the Duchess of Portsmouth. "The Court of France," says Burnet, "began to apprehend that the King might grow so much master at home, that he would be no longer in their management: and they foresaw that what success soever the King might have in a parliament in relation to his own affairs, it was not to be imagined that a house of commons, at the same time they showed their submission to the King, would not enable him to resist the progress of the French arms, and address to him to enter into alliances with the Spaniards and the States. So the French made use of all their instruments to divert our Court from calling a Parliament, and they got the King to consent to their possessing themselves of Luxembourg, for which I was told they gave him £300,000, but I have no certainty of that. Lord Montagu told me of it and seemed to believe it;* and lady Portsmouth valued herself on Luxembourg as gained by her and called it her last service to France."

* Montagu exaggerated the sum paid to Charles for this last act of subservience to France, which was a million livres (less than £80,000).

CHAPTER XX

THE EPISODE OF THE GRAND PRIOR

DURING these last years of Charles II.'s reign, the Duchess of Portsmouth performed all the functions of a Queen. In strict alliance with James and Lawrence Hyde, now Earl of Rochester, she alone dealt with the secrets of State. When James wished to marry his younger daughter, the Princess Anne, he consulted the Duchess of Portsmouth upon the choice of a husband ; and she was charged by him to ascertain the opinion of Louis XIV. regarding Prince George of Denmark, and to send the young English princess's portrait to Copenhagen. In recognition of her services in negotiating this marriage, she received from the King of Denmark a portrait of himself set in diamonds, which, according to Barrillon, was valued at fifteen hundred guineas. When an embassy from the Sultan of Morocco arrived in London, it was in her "glorious" apartments at Whitehall that the fêtes in their honour were given, where the grave Moors had the privilege of sitting down to the table with "the King's natural children, viz., Lady Lichfield and Lady Sussex, the Duchess of Portsmouth, Nelly, etc., con-

cubines and cattell of that sort, as splendid as jewels and excesse of bravery could make them.”* When, in June, 1683, Louis XIV. sent the French fleet, under the command of the Marquis de Preuilly, into the Channel, without condescending to give notice to England, it was she who “took great pains to make the King (Charles II.) understand that it was not a breach of confidence and that he ought not to allow any one to discover that it was not by arrangement, lest those who wished to destroy his friendship with Louis XIV. should take advantage of it.”† And, in concert with Barrillon, who treated her as a colleague, she managed all French interests.

The favourite’s apartments at Whitehall—the outward and visible sign of her supremacy—seem to have fully deserved the epithet which Evelyn applies to them. They far surpassed those of Queen Catherine in size and splendour; while the magnificent furniture, plate, tapestries and *objets d’art* with which they were filled must have represented a large fortune. “Following his Majesty this morning through the gallery,” writes the diarist (October 4, 1683), “I went, with the few who attended him into the Duchess of Portsmouth’s dressing-room within her bedchamber, where she was in her morning loose garment, her maids combing her, newly out of bed, and his Majesty and the gallants standing about her; but that which engaged my curiosity, was the rich and splendid furniture of this woman’s apartment, now twice or thrice pulled down and rebuilt to satisfy her prodigal and expensive pleasure, whilst her Majesty’s does not exceed some

* Evelyn.

† Barrillon.

gentlemen's ladies' in furniture and accommodation. Here I saw the new fabric of French tapestry, for design and tenderness of work, and incomparable imitation of the best paintings, beyond anything I had ever beheld. Some pieces had Versailles, St. Germain, and other palaces of the French King, with huntings, figures and landscapes, exotic fowls, and all to the life rarely done. Then for Japan cabinets, skreens, pendule-clocks, great vases, wrought plate, tables, stands, chimney-furniture, sconces, branches, braserie etc., all of massy silver, and out of number, besides some of her Majesty's best paintings."

So little had she now to fear from any rival, so firm was her hold upon the affections of Charles, that she even ventured to inflict upon him the tortures of a belated jealousy. In the spring of 1683, Philippe de Vendôme, Grand Prior of France, the younger of the two sons of Philippe, second Duc de Vendôme and Laura Mancini, elder sister of the Duchesse de Mazarin, came to London. The Grand Prior, who was at this time in his twenty-ninth year and already noted for his witty conversation, was a singularly handsome young man—in later life, he entirely lost his good looks and became coarse and bloated, which is hardly surprising, seeing that he is said never to have gone to bed sober for thirty years—and the Duchess of Portsmouth showed so marked an interest in him as to arouse the amusement of the Court and the suspicions of the King.

"Some clouds are rising," writes Barrillon to Louis XIV., "on the subject of the Grand Prior, and the King shows himself sometimes sulky and suspicious,



PHILIPPE DE VENDÔME, GRAND PRIOR OF FRANCE
From a contemporary print.

but that does not last long. Prudence would desire that Madame de Portsmouth makes use of an effective remedy, by persuading the Grand Prior to return to France. But I do not yet observe any disposition on her part to do so. Those who would give her such counsel would be certain to displease her and not to be believed. However, Madame de Portsmouth's friends are not without uneasiness. Milord Sunderland* has spoken to me about it, and fears that the King's suspicions may become stronger and may have consequences. She has still great influence [with the King]; and the most accredited Ministers are on terms of great intimacy with her. Her enemies are very much on the alert to do her an ill-turn; but up to the present they have not succeeded. She is fully warned and remains on her guard."†

Sunderland's fears were realized, in so far as regards his Majesty's suspicions. But Charles did not dare to remonstrate with the favourite; with increasing years, he had become so indolent and enervated, and so completely her slave, that he had no power of revolt left in him. However, he wished to rid himself of the rivalry of the handsome young Frenchman, and accordingly sent Sunderland to request him to cease visiting the Duchess of Portsmouth. He was obeyed for a few days, after which the visits were resumed. Charles then deputed Barrillon to inform his compatriot that it was his royal will and pleasure that he should take himself back to France. "I informed the Grand Prior of this as gently

* Sunderland, in spite of his uneasiness, had invited the Grand Prior to dinner. Evelyn, who met him there, describes him as a "young wild spark."

† Despatch of June 18, 1683, cited by Forneron.

as possible," writes Barrillon to Louis XIV., "and I endeavoured to persuade him to withdraw without making any scandal. He told me that he would not withdraw, unless the King gave him the order with his own mouth, and urged me to obtain an audience for him. I begged the King to permit the Grand Prior to receive his commands from himself, but I had considerable difficulty in obtaining this. However, in the end, the Grand Prior was accorded permission to speak to the King in his chamber. He did so, and began to justify himself. But the King did not wish to have a long conversation with him, and persisted in his first resolution. The Grand Prior, however, was not disposed to leave and begged me not to charge myself with the communication of the order to him. I represented to him the inconveniences of his behaviour, and that he would bring upon himself a treatment which it was much more desirable to avoid. But he declined to be persuaded. The strongest reason he has to allege for not leaving England, is that, having had the misfortune to incur Your Majesty's displeasure, he does not dare to return to France. The King wished me to charge myself once more with his orders to be gone. But I begged him to entrust them to some one else."

Charles successfully curbed his impatience for several days, and then, finding that his orders were still flouted, sent the Lieutenant of his Guards to inform the contumacious Vendôme that, if he were not gone in two days, he would have him conducted to Dover by his guards and placed on board the packet, if necessary, by force. Still, however, the Grand Prior lingered, and suggested that perhaps his Majesty might be satisfied if, instead

of leaving England altogether, he quitted London and retired into the country. This compromise being rejected, he thereupon offered to leave England, provided he had permission to return a little later.

At the request of the Duchess of Portsmouth, who was becoming seriously alarmed at the turn that the affair was taking, and desired at all costs to avoid a scandal, Barrillon took upon himself to propose this to the King; but Charles remained firm and insisted that the Grand Prior should take his departure immediately. At length, towards the end of November, that gentleman condescended to comply with the King's orders and sailed for Holland, to the great relief of the friends of the Duchess of Portsmouth, "who," writes Barrillon, "believe that she has got out of an affair that might have ruined her."

The lady herself was by no means so sure that she had got out of the affair; for Philippe de Vendôme had carried away a number of highly compromising letters which she had been so indiscreet as to write to him, and, as he was decidedly mortified by her conduct in not intervening to prevent him being driven from her side by the jealousy of the King, she was in mortal fear lest he should make them public.

"It appears to me," writes Barrillon, "that Madame de Portsmouth and the Grand Prior are not too satisfied with one another. I know that she was apprehensive lest he should show her letters. There was, however, no appearance that the Grand Prior intended to proceed to such an extremity. The truth is that he did not wish to leave here, and that he hoped to derive great advantages and great consideration from his intimacy with Madame de Portsmouth. All that appears well ended,

but Madame de Portsmouth is not without uneasiness lest the Grand Prior should yet make some scene in public."

Louis XIV. did not hesitate to intervene in person to free from all embarrassment the woman whose assistance he considered so necessary to the success of his foreign policy. He ordered the Duc de Vendôme* to write to his younger brother, who was at The Hague, to inform him that he was at liberty to return to Versailles where he would meet with "a more favourable reception than his conduct in England deserved;" and he instructed Barrillon to assure the Duchess of Portsmouth that, the moment the Grand Prior arrived, it was his intention to warn him that any disclosures to the disadvantage of that lady would bring down upon him his resentment—a threat which, in the days of the Bastille and *lettres de cachet*, was not one to be disregarded, even by a Prince of the Blood.

Philippe de Vendôme obeyed the royal command and maintained a perpetual silence about this adventure; insomuch that when, many years later, the Regent Duc d'Orléans, who had learned that it was the jealousy of Charles II. which had cut short the Grand Prior's visit to England, happened to refer to the audacity of his kinsman in entering the lists of love against a prince in his own dominions, he showed that he was under the impression that it was one of Charles's subordinate mistresses who had been the cause of the trouble.

The Grand Prior did not, however, seem in any hurry to avail himself of his Sovereign's permission to return

* Louis Joseph de Vendôme, who so greatly distinguished himself as a general in the War of the Spanish Succession.

to the Court of France, and the Duchess of Portsmouth, who appears to have formed anything but a high opinion of her admirer's character, remained in dread of his possible indiscretions for some months, particularly when she heard that he was talking of revisiting England. To calm her apprehensions, Louis XIV. sent him positive orders to return immediately to Versailles and charged Barrillon to inform the duchess that if, in the face of this, he persisted in coming to England, Charles II. was perfectly at liberty to have him arrested and thrown into prison. Eventually, the Grand Prior reappeared at Versailles, and the affair which had caused the Duchess of Portsmouth so much anxiety terminated without any scandal.

The indiscretions—or worse—of the favourite with the Grand Prior, so far from being followed by any coolness on the part of Charles towards her, seem to have riveted still faster the chains by which she had bound him. “The King,” writes Burnet, “was observed to be more than ordinarily pensive, and his fondness to Lady Portsmouth increased much and broke out in very indecent instances. . . . The King caressed and kissed her in the view of all people ; which he had never done on any occasion, or to any person, formerly.”

At the beginning of 1684, Charles, at the lady's instance, asked that Louis XIV. would erect the Aubigny estates into a duchy, with remainder to her son, Charles Lennox, Duke of Richmond. Barrillon, when communicating the King's request to Versailles, thought it his duty to protest against such a pretension, as the Duchess of Portsmouth had been accorded by special favour, the *tabouret* in the presence of the Queen during

her recent visit to France ; and this, in his opinion, was a sufficient concession. Louis, however, did not hesitate, and replied that letters patent should be made out at once. Charles, the Ambassador informs his master, was overwhelmed with delight on learning that his request was to be accorded, and hastened to communicate the good news to the sultana, who "displayed an excessive joy, and has since received the congratulations of the whole Court."

From that moment, the Duchess of Portsmouth became, if it were possible, a more important personage than ever, and when she fell ill at the beginning of November, 1684, her illness caused all the Court functions to be suspended, and Charles spent nearly the whole of his time in the sick-room. Louis XIV. wrote to Barrillon expressing the hope that her illness would but increase her credit, and instructing the Ambassador to keep him informed on that point ; and, to secure her son in the possession of the Aubigny estates in the event of her death, caused letters of naturalization to be made out in favour of "his very dear and beloved cousin the Prince Charles de Lennox, Duc de Richmond."

CHAPTER XXI

NELL GWYN'S LETTERS

AFTER the fire which had saved him from the Rye House Plot, but had left him without lodgings at Newmarket, Charles decided on building a palace at Winchester, the country around which afforded excellent opportunities for sport, and particularly for hawking; and Sir Christopher Wren was instructed to design a magnificent palace there, on the site of the ruins of the old castle. The work was commenced without delay, and the King, with part of the Court, which, of course, included the Duchess of Portsmouth and Nell Gwyn, often came down to inspect progress, and enjoy a week or two's hunting or hawking in the New Forest, which he occasionally varied by a day's fishing in the Itchin. At such times the King lodged at the bishop's palace, while the houses of the dean and prebendaries were used for the accommodation of his courtiers. On one occasion, the pious and learned Ken, then one of the King's chaplains and a prebendary of Winchester, was required to surrender his official residence to Nell Gwyn. He remonstrated with indignation. "A woman of ill repute," he exclaimed, "ought not to be endured in the

house of a clergyman, least of all in that of the King's chaplain."

Bowles, in his "Life of Ken," states that the tradition at Winchester was that Nell had already installed herself in the canonical lodging and that she refused to move, and did not move, until Ken had caused part of the roof to be taken off. Any way, she had to be accommodated at the Deanery, from which, however, she subsequently removed to Avington, the seat of the notorious Countess of Shrewsbury, about three miles to the north-east of the cathedral town. Here, about the middle of the last century, Cunningham tells us, a room which she is said to have used as a dressing-room was still shown.

Charles, though little accustomed to meet with such refusals, was far from taking offence at his chaplain's outspokenness. He had a strong liking for Ken, whom he knew to be a good and honest man, as well as a profound scholar and an eloquent preacher, and he appreciated his courage in risking the royal displeasure and his chances of preferment at the bidding of his conscientious scruples. He determined that he should not be the loser by it; and when, shortly afterwards, the see of Bath and Wells became vacant by the translation of Mews to Winchester, he selected "the little black fellow who would not give poor Nelly a night's lodging" from among a crowd of applicants.

Charles II. had his own way of atoning for his misdeeds, and one of the best actions of his life was the erection of Chelsea Hospital for aged and disabled soldiers, the first stone of which was laid by the King himself in the spring of 1682. A popular tradition

asserts that the idea originated with Nell Gwyn, and though there is no corroboration in history of this, it may none the less be correct. "I see no reason to doubt the tradition," writes Cunningham, "supported as it is by the well-known benevolence of her character, her sympathy with the suffering, and the fact that sixty years ago at least Nelly's share in its foundation was recorded beneath her portrait, serving as the sign of a public house adjoining the Hospital. The sign remains, but not the inscription. Yet the tradition is still rife in Chelsea, and is not soon likely to die out; Ormonds, and Granbys, and Admiral Vernons disappear, but Nelly remains, and long may she swing with her favourite lamb in the row or street commemorated for ever in the Chelsea Pensioners of Wilkie."

Mr. Wheatley, in a footnote to the 1903 edition of Cunningham's book, observes: "There is no corroboration in history of the popular tradition that Nell Gwyn suggested the foundation of Chelsea Hospital. Evelyn was intimately associated with the early history of the Hospital, and he says that to Sir Stephen Fox was due the suggestion to Charles II. of the erection of a royal hospital "for emerited soldiers." But, as Mr. Cecil Chesterton points out, Evelyn does not say this. His words are these: 'Dined with Sir Stephen Fox, who proposed to me the purchasing of Chelsea College, which his Majesty had some time since given to our Society (i.e., the Royal Society), and *would now purchase it again* to build a hospital or infirmary for soldiers there, in which he desired my assistance, as on the Council of the Royal Society.'*" There is certainly nothing in this

* Evelyn's Diary, June 14, 1681.

passage to contradict the tradition which points to Nell as the originator of the project."

In 1679 Nell had lost her mother, who, as recorded earlier in this volume, was drowned through falling accidentally into the water near the Neat Houses, at Chelsea, when, if Etherege is to be believed, in a not too sober condition. Nell had been very much attached to the old lady, who appears to have lived with her for some time in Pall Mall, and she gave her a sumptuous funeral at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, where she herself was to be buried. Rochester, in his satire against Nell, found in this material for some of his bitterest taunts :

Nor was her mother's funeral less her care ;
No cost, no velvet did her daughter spare ;
Fine gilded 'scutcheons did the Herse enrich
To celebrate this Martyr of the Ditch ;
Burnt brandy did in flaming Brimmers flow,
Drank at her funeral, while her well-pleased shade
Rejoiced even in the sober fields below
At all the Drunkenness her Death had made.

In September of the following year, a far worse loss befell Nell in the death of her younger son, James, Lord Beauclerk, who died in Paris, whither he had been sent to be educated. He was not quite nine years old. Some consolation awaited her, however, in the honours bestowed upon her surviving son, the little Earl of Burford, who, on January 10, 1683-4, a week after the death of old Henry Jermyn, Earl of St. Albans, was created Duke of St. Albans and appointed to the then lucrative offices of Registrar of the Court of Chancery and Master Falconer of England. The latter office, though, of course, it is now a



JOHN WILMOT, SECOND EARL OF ROCHESTER

From a painting, probably by Wissing.

purely honorary one, is still held by the present Duke of St. Albans.

One of the few of Nell Gwyn's letters known to exist relates to this period of her life. It is not written by her, since she was so illiterate that she could not even sign her name, and was content with an E. G., but by an amanuensis, who wrote in a neat Italian hand, and is as follows :

“ These for Madam Jennings* over
against the Tub Tavern in Jermyn Street,
London.

“ Windsor, Burford House,

“ April 14, 1684.

“ MADAM,—I have received y^r Letter, and I desire yu would speake to my Ladie Williams to send me the Gold Stuffle & a Note with it, because I must sign it, then she shall have her money y^e next day of Mr. Trant; pray tell her Ladieship, that I will send her a Note of what Quantity of Things I^e have bought if her Ladieship will put herself to y^e Trouble to buy them; when they are bought, I will sign a Note for her to be payd. Pray Madam, let y^r Man go on with my Sedan and send Potvint† and Mr. Coker down to me, for I want them both. The Bill is very dear to boyle the Plate, but necessity hath noe Law. I am afraid M^m you have forgott my Mantle, which you were to line with Musk Colour Sattin, and all

* Who this lady was is not known.

† John Potvin. He was a fashionable upholsterer of the time, and his name appears as a witness to a power of attorney of Nell, published by the Camden Society in the “Privy Purse Expenses of the Reigns of Charles II. and James II.”

my other Things, for you send me noe Patterns nor Answer. Monsieur Lainey is going away. Pray send me word about your son Criffin for his Majestie is mighty well pleased that he will goe along with my Lord Duke.* I am afraid you are so much taken up with your owne House, that you forget my Business. My service to dear Lord Kildare, and tell him I love him with all my heart. Pray M^m see that Potvin brings now all my things with him: my Lord Duke's bed, etc., if he hath not made them all up, he may doe that here, for if I doe not get my Things out of his hands now, I shall not have them until this time twelvemonth. The Duke brought me down with him my Crochet of diamonds; and I love it the better because he brought it. Mr. Lumby and everie body else will tell you that it is the finest Thing that ever was seen. Good M^m speak to Mr. Beaver to come down too, that I may bespeake a ring for the Duke of Grafton before he goes to France.

"I have continued extreme ill ever since you left me, and I am soe still. I have sent to London for a Dr. I believe I shall die. My service to the Duchess of Norfolk, and tell her I am as *sick* as her Grace, but do not know what I ayle, although shee does. . . .

"Pray tell my Ladie Williams that the King's Mistresses are accounted ill paymasters, but shee shall have her Money the next day after I have the stuffe.

"Here is a sad slaughter at Windsor, the young Mens taking y^r Leaves and going to France, and,

* Charles Beauclerk, Duke of St. Albans.

although they are none of my Lovers, yet I am loath to part with the men. Mrs. Jennings, I love you with all my heart and soe good-bye.

“ E. G.

“ Let me have an answer to this letter.”*

Here is another of Nell's letters, belonging to an earlier date. It appears to have been written in August, 1678, and is addressed to Lawrence Hyde, afterwards Earl of Rochester, at that time Ambassador Extraordinary at The Hague. It was first published in the Camden Miscellany (vol. v.), with notes in explanation of the persons mentioned therein by John Bruce :—

“ Pray Deare Mr. Hide forgive me for not writeing to you before now, for the reasone is I have bin sick thre months, and since I recovered I have had nothing to intertaine you withall, nor have nothing now worth writing, but that I can holde no longer to let you know I never have ben in any companie without drinking your health, for I love you with all my soule. The pel mel is now to me a dismale place, since I have utterly lost Sr. Car Scrope,† never to be recovered agane, for he tould me he could not live

* This highly characteristic letter, which was published, we believe, for the first time by Cunningham in his “ Story of Nell Gwyn,” was discovered by Horace Walpole's correspondent, the Rev. William Cole, who sent a copy of it to his friend. Under date January 9, 1775, Walpole writes : “ I every day intended to thank you for the copy of Nell Gwyn's letter, till it was too late ; the gout came and made me moult my goose quill. The letter is very curious, and I am as well content as with the original.”

† He was one of the witty companions of Charles II. and a versifier of some merit. He died in 1680.

alwayes at this rate, and so begune to be a little uncivil, which I could not suffer from an uglye *baux garson*. Mrs. Knight's* lady mother's dead, and she has put up a scutchin no beiger than my Lady Grin's† scunchis. My lord Rochester‡ is gone in the countrei. Mr. Savil has got a misfortune, but is upon recovery and is to mary an hairess, who I think wont wont (*sic*) have an ill time ont if he holds up his thumb. My lord of Dorset§ apiers worse in thre months, for he drinks aile with Shadwell|| and Mr. Haris¶ at the Duke's home all day long. My lord Burford remembars his sarvis to you. My lord Bauclore is is (*sic*) goeing into France. We are agoeing to sup with the King at Whitehall and my Lady Harvie. The King remembars his sarvis to you. Now lets talke of state affairs, for we never caried things so cunningly as now, for we don't know whether we shall have peace or war, but I am for war, and for no other reason but that you may come home. I have a thousand merry conseets, but I can't make write me, and therefore you must take the will for the deed. God bye. Your most loveing obedient faithfull and humbel sarvant

“ E. G.”

* Mrs. Knight was a singer of great ability, and had at one time been honoured by the King's attentions.

† Widow of Sir Edward Greene, Bart. of Sandford, in Essex. She was one of the King's mistresses and had two children by him—a son named Charles Fitz-Charles, who was created Earl of Plymouth in 1675 and died in 1680, and a daughter named Catherine.

‡ John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, who died in 1680, and whose title was conferred on Lawrence Hyde himself two years afterwards.

§ Nell's old admirer, formerly Lord Buckhurst.

|| Thomas Shadwell, afterwards Poet Laureate.

¶ Henry Harria, the actor.

Although Nell's elder son had been created a duke, as had the sons of the Duchess of Cleveland and the Duchess of Portsmouth, she herself remained plain "Mrs." Gwyn. Nor can we be surprised at this, when we remember what a wide difference existed in social status between her and the ladies in question. Barbara Villiers was the daughter of a peer and the wife of a peer; while Louise de Kéroualle belonged to one of the most ancient families in Brittany. Their elevation, therefore, however much it might scandalize public opinion, did not outrage the feelings of the aristocracy. But to have ennobled the ex-orange-girl would have been an altogether different matter, and would have been regarded as an affront to the peerage, then an infinitely more exclusive body than it is in these democratic days. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that at the beginning of 1685 Charles II. had decided to bestow a peerage upon Nell, the title selected for her being that of Countess of Greenwich.* If, however, such were really the case, death intervened before the patent could be made out.

* In a MS. folio, entitled "The Royal Cedar," by Frederick van Bessen, compiled in 1688 occurs the following passage:—

"Charles, the 2d naturall sone of King Charles the 2d borne of Hellenor or Nelguine, daughter to Thomas Gwine, a capitaine of an antient family in Wales, who shoudl bein advanced to be Countes of Greeniez (Greenwich); but hindered by the King's death, and she lived not long after his Matie. Item, he was advanced to the title of Duke Stablanc [St. Albans] and Earl of Berward [Burford]. He is not married."

CHAPTER XXII

THE DEATH OF CHARLES II

SINCE his serious illness in the late summer of 1679, Charles II., as we have mentioned, had never been the same man ; and, as time went on, it became apparent that the dissolute life he had led had begun to tell upon him and that his health was failing. In 1680 he had a bad attack of ague, and Henry Sidney notes in his diary that "they had all been sadly alarmed," and in May, 1682, a slight apoplectic stroke. From that moment, the change in him was still more marked. He showed on occasion an irritability hitherto quite foreign to his nature ; he seemed indisposed for any physical exertion, confining himself to a short walk twice daily in St. James's Park or the garden of Arlington House, and that merely for health's sake ; and on his evening visits to the Duchess of Portsmouth he often became so drowsy as to fall asleep in his chair. Towards the end of January, 1685, he had a small sore on his heel, which prevented him from walking, and he accordingly took the air in a calash, attended by Thomas Bruce, afterwards Earl of Aylesbury, the gentleman-in-waiting who was

on duty that week, and to whose valuable memoirs, which remained unpublished until the end of the nineteenth century, we owe the most circumstantial account we possess of Charles II.'s last illness.

On the evening of Sunday, February 1, the King seemed more like himself than he had been for a long time, and the gallery at Whitehall presented an unusually animated spectacle. "I can never forget," writes Evelyn, who was among those present, "the inexpressible luxury and profaneness, gaming and all dissoluteness, and, as it were, a total forgetfulness of God (it being Sunday evening) which this day se'nnight I was witness of: the King sitting and toying with his concubines, Portsmouth, Cleveland, Mazarin, etc., a French boy singing love songs, in that glorious gallery, while about twenty of the great courtiers and other dissolute persons were at Basset round a large table, a bank of at least two thousand in gold before them; upon which two gentlemen who were with me made reflections with astonishment. Six days after all was in the dust."

Thomas Bruce tells us that his father, the old Earl of Aylesbury, who lived at some distance from Whitehall and seldom visited it, had come that evening, at his request, to attend the King's supper. Charles noticed him at once and spoke to him most graciously. "It is a great wonder, my Lord," said he, "for to see you at this hour, but I know very well the reason I never see you; but I am ashamed that I have never given you more marks of my favour. But I will make it up to your son; he is now about me, and we shall never part." "It is not to be expressed," continues

Bruce, "the transport of joy my father was in, and the old courtiers assured me that they never saw the King so well, nor in so good a humour."

Charles "did eat with an excellent stomach, and one thing very hard of digestion—a goose egg if not two." After supper, he went, according to his custom, to the Duchess of Portsmouth's apartments, "for to amuse himself with the company that ate there;" and Bruce, who followed him a little later, found him laughing and jesting with the company, and it was remarked on all sides that no one had ever seen the King in such good humour.

It was Bruce's duty to light him to his bed-chamber. On reaching it, he handed the candle to the page of the backstairs. As he did so, the candle suddenly went out, "although a very large wax candle and without any wind." It was an age when many people still believed in omens and portents, as may be gathered from the writings of John Aubrey and others, and the page of the backstairs, who was one of them, looked at his companion in dismay and shook his head. The King, having already passed into his bedroom, had noticed nothing, and his good humour continued while he was preparing for bed. The conversation turned to the palace which was being built at Winchester, and which was now all but finished.

"My Lord," said he to Bruce, "I do not remember that I ever saw you there." Bruce answered modestly that "his study was never to intrude himself as so many others did." "God's fish!" rejoined the King, smiling, "modesty must sooner or later be

rewarded, and when 'tis otherwise, 'tis the fault of the Sovereign, and not of the subject." (A great, good and noble expression from the mouth of a great King!) "I will order John" (a familiar word for the Earl of Bath, groom of the Stole, who was with the King as a boy), "to put you into waiting the first time I go thither, and although it be not your turn, that I may show you the place I delight so in." And he added: "I shall be so happy this week as to have my house covered with lead." "And God knows," observes Bruce, "the Saturday following he was put into his coffin!"

Bruce, who occupied a bed in the King's room, passed a far from comfortable night. "Several circumstances made the lodging very uneasy—the great grate being filled with Scotch coal that burnt all night, a dozen dogs that came to our bed, and several pendulums that struck at the half, quarter, and all not going alike, it was a continual chiming." Charles, being used to these inconveniences, invariably slept soundly; but Bruce, who slept but little, noticed that he appeared rather restless, and "turned himself sometimes, not usual for him." However, when morning came, the King called out, according to his custom, that he was going to rise, and Bruce "discovered not any imperfection" in his voice. But we will allow the chronicler to relate what followed in his own words:

"We had the liberty to go to his bedside in the morning before anybody came in, and might entertain him with discourse at pleasure, and ask of him anything. Unfortunately, a certain modesty possessed

me, and, besides, we had his ear whenever we pleased. So I rose and turned back the brass knob [of the bedchamber door], and the under ones came in to make the fire, and I retired to dress myself in our room. Passing by into the next room to the bedchamber, I found there the physicians and chirurgeons that attended to his heel. Mr. Robert Howard, Groom of the Bedchamber, came to me and asked me if the King had slept, and if quietly. I told him that he had turned sometimes. 'Lord!' said he, 'that is an ill mark, and contrary to his custom;' and then told me that at rising he could, or would not, say one word, that he was pale as ashes, and gone to his private closet. On which I came away presently and sent in Mr. Chiffins (*sic*), the first page of the backstairs and Keeper of the Closet, for to beg of him to come to his chamber, for a more bitter morning I never felt, and he only in his night-gown. Mr. Chiffins telling me he minded not what he said, I sent him in again (for no other had that liberty), on which he [the King] came out pale and wan, and had not the liberty of his tongue, for the Earl of Craven, Colonel of the foot-guards, being there to take the word, he showed him the paper where the days of the month were set down with the word; and others spoke to him, but he answered nothing. It being shaving day, the barber told him all was ready. He always sat with his knees against the window, and the barber having fixed the linen on one side, went behind the chair to do the same on the other, and I, standing close to the chair, he fell into my arms in the most violent fit of apoplexy. Doctor King, that had been

a chirurgeon, happened to be in the room of his own accord—the rest having retired before. I asked him if he had any lancets, and he replying he had, I ordered him to bleed the King without delay, which he did ; and, perceiving the blood, I went to fetch the Duke of York, who came so on the instant that he had one shoe and one slipper. At my return with the Duke, the King was in bed, and in a pretty good state, and going on the contrary side where the Duke was, he perceiving me, took me by the hand, saying, ‘I see you love me dying as well as living,’ and thanked me heartily for the orders I gave Dr. King (who was knighted for that service) to bleed him, as also for sending Mr. Chiffins to persuade him to come out of his closet ; and then told me that he found himself not well, and that he went to take some of his drops, commonly called the ‘King’s Drops,’ and that he walked about hoping to be better, but on my solicitations he came down, for there were three or four steps coming out of the closet, and he said that coming down his head turned round, and he was in danger of falling.”

Lord Macaulay, in that masterpiece of descriptive writing in which he paints for us the last days of Charles II., asserts, on the authority of Burnet, that “for a short time, the Duchess of Portsmouth hung over him [the King] with the familiarity of a wife.” But Burnet’s statement does not accord with what Bruce tells us in his memoirs and is expressly refuted by that writer in a private letter to Mr. Leigh of Addlestone :

“My good King and master falling upon me in

his fit, I ordered him to be blooded, and then I went to fetch the Duke of York; and, when we came to the bedside, we found the Queen there, and the impostor says it was the Duchess of Portsmouth."

On the following day, Charles appeared so much better that messengers were despatched in all directions to report that he was on the way to recovery. But this improvement was of very short duration and despite, or perhaps because of, all the blisterings, bleedings, and emetics to which the doctors had recourse, by Wednesday evening they were obliged to admit that he was in imminent danger.

On Thursday, all the bishops then in London, with Sancroft, the Archbishop of Canterbury, at their head, came to offer the King their spiritual service. "The Archbishop was of a timid temper and had a low voice, and Bishop Ken the contrary, one like to a nightingale for the sweetness of it, so he was desired by the rest to persuade the King to hearken to them." But, though on the very threshold of death, Charles resorted to that habit of polite evasion which had served him so often and so well in life. He was quite ready to be courteous to the bishops—courtesy was his point of honour—but he was determined not to take the Sacrament from their hands. "The King," continues Bruce, "thanked them very much, and told them that it was time enough, or something to that purpose, and modestly waived them, which was in my hearing."

Some attributed this disguised refusal to Charles's indifference to religion, but a few appear to have ascribed it to its true cause. Towards evening, the

sick man grew perceptibly worse, and the doctors warned the Duke of York that he was "not like to live a day to an end."*

It seems singular that James, who was, of course, aware why the King had declined to receive the Sacrament according to the rites of the Established Church, should not have done his very obvious duty. But the fact is that that prince was too much occupied in taking precautionary measures to assure his peaceable succession to the throne to have any time to think of his brother's soul. And it is only too probable that Charles would have been allowed to die without the consolations of religion, had not the Duchess of Portsmouth, who was one of the few in the secret of the King's religious convictions, taken upon herself to intervene.

Forbidden by decency to approach her dying lover, she sent an urgent message to Barrillon, begging him to come to her at once, and, when he arrived, implored him to go to the Duke of York and persuade him to act before it should be too late. But let us listen to the Ambassador.

"I found her," he writes, "overwhelmed with grief; but, instead of speaking to me of her grief and of the loss she was on the point of sustaining, she went into her private cabinet and said to me: '*Monsieur l'ambassadeur*, I am going to tell you the greatest secret in the world, and I should lose my head if it were known. The King of England is at the bottom of his heart a Catholic; but he is surrounded by Protestant bishops, and no one tells him of the

* Burnet, "History of my own Times."

condition in which he is in, or speaks to him of God. I cannot with decency re-enter the room; besides that, the Queen is almost continually there. The Duke of York is thinking of his own affairs, and has too many of them to take the care that he ought of the King's conscience. Go and tell him that I have implored you to warn him to consider what can be done to save the King, his brother's, soul.'"

? By which speech, it will, we think, be admitted that Louise de K roualle atoned for much.

Barrillon hastened to carry out his instructions, and James, recalled thus to his duty, hastened to his brother's bedside, and, bending down, inquired if he should send for a priest.

"For God's sake, brother, do, and lose no time!" was the reply.*

And then came the most dramatic incident of Charles's eventful life. Every one was ordered to leave the room, with the exception of the Earls of Bath and Feversham. A private door near the head of the King's bed opened, and Will Chiffinch—who had so often introduced persons of a very different character by that same door—ushered in a Benedictine monk bearing the sacred elements. The monk was John Huddleston, who, when a secular priest, had contributed to save Charles's life at Mosely Hall after the fatal battle of Worcester, and had given him the first works of Catholic devotion which he had ever read. He had remained under the King's special protection, as one of the chaplains to the Queen, throughout the

* Clarke, "Life of James II."

reign, and had thus escaped the fate which befell so many of his brethren during the Popish terror.

"As soon as the King saw the father come in, he cried out: 'You that saved my body is now come to save my soul.' This is literally true on a Christian.* The King made a general confession with a most true, hearty and sincere repentance, weeping and bewailing his sins, and he received what is styled all the rites of the Church, and like a true and hearty penitent."†

The monk withdrew by the way he had come, the door was opened, and nobles and prelates trooped back into the room. It was then that Charles made his famous apology for having "been an unconscionable time dying." He spoke with tenderness of his neglected wife. "The Queen (she having been present with him as long as her extraordinary passion would give her leave, which at length threw her into fits, not being able to speak while with him) sent a message to excuse her absence and to beg his pardon if ever she had offended him in all her life. He replied: 'Alas, poor woman! She begs my pardon! I beg hers with all my heart.' "‡

His sons were brought to him to receive his blessing, after which he summoned up all his remaining strength to give his final injunctions to the Duke of York, "to which every one hearkened with great attention. He expressed his kindness to him, and that he now delivered all over to him with great joy. He recommended Lady Portsmouth over and

* "On my word as a Christian," or "As I am a Christian."

† "Memoirs of Thomas Bruce, Earl of Ailesbury."

‡ Clarke, "Life of James II."

over again to him. He said he had always loved her, and he loved her now to the last ; and besought the duke in as melting words as he could fetch out to be kind to her and her son ; and concluded, ' Let not poor Nelly starve ' : that was Mrs. Gwyn.*

Soon afterwards he lost consciousness, and " just at high water and full moon at noon he expired,"† in the fifty-fifth year of his age and the twenty-fifth of his reign, or, if we reckon from the death of Charles I., in his thirty-seventh. " And to this hour," concludes Bruce—and his words are a striking testimony to the real devotion which Charles's winning manners and kindly consideration had inspired in those about his person—" I bewail my loss and that of the three kingdoms ! "

* Burnet, " History of my own Times."

† " Memoirs of Thomas Bruce, Earl of Ailesbury."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAST DAYS OF NELL GWYN

CHARLES II.'s dying request to his brother on behalf of "poor Nelly" was urgently needed, for the loss of her royal protector left that lady in a most unenviable situation. She had been far too extravagant and generous-hearted ever to trouble herself about keeping within the allowance assigned to her, much less of putting by against a rainy day; and the fact that only a few months previously she had been obliged to have part at least of her plate melted down because "necessity hath no law," proves that she must even then have been pressed by her creditors. Now that Charles was dead, and the security on which they had counted had died with him, they swooped down upon her like a flock of vultures, and she found herself face to face with ruin. In her efforts to satisfy their demands, she appears to have sold most of her jewellery, including the magnificent pearl-necklace which Prince Rupert had given to Peg Hughes, and which, after the prince's death, she had purchased from her for over four thousand guineas.*

* In Lely's two portraits of Nell at Althorp and in another by Varelst at Littlecotes she is represented wearing this necklace.

But it was to no purpose, and in the spring of 1685 she was declared an outlaw for her debts and in hourly danger of being thrown into prison.

The new King, however, had not forgotten his brother's dying request, besides which he had always been on excellent terms with Nell; and he had no intention of allowing her to want. His secret service expenses for that year record the payment of £729 2s. 3d. to Richard Graham, Esq., "to be by him paid over to the several tradesmen, creditors of Mrs. Ellen Gwyn, in satisfaction of their debts for which the said Ellen stood outlawed." Some months later, two additional payments of £500 each were made to her, by way of royal bounty, and an allowance of £1,500 a year assigned to her; and in 1687 the same book of accounts shows a payment to Sir Stephen Fox, Commissioner of the Treasury, of £1,256 os. 2d. for so much by him paid to Sir Richard Clayton, in full of £3,774 2s. 6d., to redeem the mortgages to Sir John Musters, of Bestwood Park,* "for settling the same for life upon Mrs. Ellen Gwyn and, after her death, upon the Duke of St. Albans and his issue male, with the reversion in the Crown."†

James's kindness to Nell, and his well-known zeal for making proselytes, gave rise to a rumour that she was about to join the Church of Rome. Under date January 19, 1685-6, Evelyn writes: "Dryden,

* Bestwood Park, in Nottinghamshire, on the borders of Sherwood Forest, had for centuries been an appurtenance of the Crown. Richard III. was at Bestwood when he heard of Henry Tudor's approach. It is still the property of the Duke of St. Albans.

† "Secret Service Expenses of Charles II. and James II." (printed for the Camden Society.)

the famous play-writer, and his two sons and Mrs. Nelly (Miss to the late King) were said to go to Mass; such proselytes are no great loss to the Church."

This rumour was true enough as regards Dryden and his son, but certainly not in regard to Nell, who in her last illness received the spiritual administrations of Tenison, then Vicar of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, and was buried according to Protestant forms in a Protestant church; while in her will she speaks of Roman Catholics as "those who differ from me in religion." The report, however, that she had attended Mass was no doubt correct, for we can well understand that she may have thought it politic to please the new King by consenting to do so and perhaps to receive instruction from Catholic priests. However, she resisted the attempts to detach her from the Reformed Faith, and those who may be tempted to smile at the idea that such a woman should have troubled herself about religion must remember that in those days of bitter sectarian animosity a warm attachment to a creed was not considered inconsistent with a very irregular life. James II., who sacrificed his crown to his proselytizing zeal, appears to have entertained very little respect for the Seventh Commandment.

Nell did not long survive her royal lover. Although she was still a young woman, she appears to have been in very indifferent health for some time. Towards the end of March, 1687, she had an attack of apoplexy, and Luttrell recorded that "her recovery was much doubted"*; and, though she lived for some months,

* "Brief Relation of State Affairs."

a second attack in the following November proved fatal. The exact day of her death is uncertain, but it is believed to have been on the 14th of the month.

At the beginning of July, she had made her will, in which, after, "in the hope of a joyful resurrection, recommending herself whence she came, her soul into the hands of Almighty God and her body into the earth," she left all her property to her "dear natural son, his Grace the Duke of St. Albans, and to the heirs of his body," and appointed Lawrence Hyde, Earl of Rochester, Thomas, Earl of Pembroke, Sir Robert Sawyer, the Attorney-General, and Henry Sidney her executors, bequeathing "all and every of them £100 a-piece of lawful money, in consideration of their care and trouble herein, and, furthermore, all their several and respective expenses and charges in and about the execution of this my will."

To this, three months later, was added a codicil, written on a separate sheet of paper, and called :—

*The last request of Mrs. Ellin' Gwynn to his Grace
the Duke of St. Albans, made October the 18th, 1687.*

1. I desire I may be buried in the church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.

2. That Dr. Tenison may preach my funeral sermon.

3. That there may be a decent pulpit-cloth and cushion given to St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.

4. That he [the Duke] would give one hundred pounds for the use of the said St. Martin's and St.



NELL GWYN

From a painting by Sir Peter Lely at Allthorp, photographed by kind permission of Earl Spencer.

James's, Westminster, to be given into the hands of the said Dr. Tenison,* to be disposed of at his discretion, for taking any poor debtors of the said parish out of prison, and for cloaths this winter, and other necessities, as he shall find most fit.

5. That for showing my charity to those who differ from me in religion, I desire that fifty pounds may be put into the hands of Dr. Tenison and Mr. Warner, who, taking to them any two persons of the Roman Religion, may dispose of it for the use of the poor of that religion inhabiting the parish of St. James's aforesaid.

6. That Mrs. Rose Forster† may have two hundred pounds given her any time within a year after my decease.

7. That Jo, my porter, may have ten pounds given him.

My request to his Grace is, further :

8. That my present nurses may have ten pounds each, and mourning, besides their wages due to them.

9. That my present servants may have their mourning each, and a year's wages, besides their wages due.

10. That the Lady Fairborne‡ may have fifty pounds given to her to buy a ring.

11. That my kinsman, Mr. Cholmley, may have one hundred pounds given to him within a year after this date.

* From 1686-1692 Tenison was rector of St. James's, Westminster, or St. James's, Piccadilly, as it is now called, as well of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.

† Nell Gwyn's sister. See p. 42 *supra*.

‡ Wife of Sir Palmer Fairborne.

12. That his Grace would be pleased to lay out twenty pounds yearly for the releasing of poor debtors out of prison every Christmas-day.

13. That Mr. John Warner may have fifty pounds given him to buy a ring.

14. That the Lady Hollyman may have the pension of ten shillings per week continued during the said lady's life.

Oct. 18—87. *This request was attested and acknowledged in the presence of us,*

JOHN HETHERINGTON.

HANNAH GRACE.

DANIEL DYER.

This document, often quoted as an illustration of Nell's kindness of heart, reveals, as Mr. Cecil Chesterton has well observed, a rarer and perhaps more important quality: real *sympathy* with the poor, that is to say, a capacity for feeling *with* them, and not merely *for* them. "Notice the repeated injunctions as to getting debtors out of prison. No mere benevolent rich man would ever have thought of such a form of charity. Nellie thought of it, because she *knew*. Her own father is said to have died in a debtor's prison. In the world in which her childhood was passed, arrest for debt was probably the standing terror for the poor, as distraint for rent is to-day. . . . When I find a philanthropist leaving money to pay out the bailiffs for people whose rent is unpaid, I shall think him fit to rank with Nell as an example of practical charity."

In her last illness, she exhibited a sincere repentance

for her past life. Cibber states in his "Apology" that he had been informed on unquestioned authority that "her repentance in her last hours appeared in the contrite symptoms of a Christian sincerity;" while Wigmore wrote to Sir George Etherege, then Envoy at Ratisbon: "She is said to have died piously and penitently; and, as she dispensed several charities in her lifetime, so she left several such legacies at her death."

On November 17 Nell was buried, in accordance with her own request, in the church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, where her mother had been laid to rest eight years before. It was not a particularly ostentatious ceremony, considering the style in which funerals were then commonly conducted, the expenses amounting to £375, which was advanced by Sir Stephen Fox, the Commissioner of the Treasury, from the next quarterly instalment of the pension of £1,500 a year which James II. had assigned her and which was to be continued to her son, the Duke of St. Albans.

Dr. Tenison complied with her request and preached the funeral sermon to a crowded congregation, for Nell had been immensely popular, and the rector of St. Martin's was "one of the most profitable preachers in the Church of England."* What the good man said—except that he said "much to her praise"—is not recorded, for, though a pamphlet purporting to be

* Evelyn, March 21, 1683. The diarist adds that he was "also of a most holy conversation and most learned and ingenuous;" and expresses a fear that "the pains he takes and the care of his parish will wear him out, which would be an inexpressible loss." Tenison had ministered to the notorious Edward Turberville (December, 1681), to Sir Thomas Armstrong at Tyburn (June, 1684), and to the Duke of Monmouth before his execution in July, 1685.

Nell's *oraison funèbre* was afterwards printed and hawked about the streets, the preacher hastened to denounce it as "the forgery of some mercenary people."

It was certainly a bold thing of Tenison to preach such a sermon, and he did not escape censure. When, four years later, the see of Lincoln became vacant, and Tenison was on the point of being nominated to it, Viscount Villiers, afterwards the first Earl of Jersey, Master of the Horse to Queen Mary, who desired the promotion of a *protégé* of his own, took upon himself to remonstrate against the proposed appointment, on the ground that the rector of St. Martin's had preached "a notable funeral sermon in praise of Ellen Gwyn." But the wife of William of Orange was not to be influenced by so poor an argument, and her reply did credit to her good sense. "I have heard as much," said she, "and this is a sign that the poor unfortunate woman died penitent; for, if I have read a man's heart through his looks, had she not made a truly pious end, the doctor could never have been induced to speak well of her."

And so Tenison obtained the vacant see, which was to prove a stepping-stone to the highest office in the Church.

CHAPTER XXIV

EXEUNT PORTSMOUTH AND MAZARIN

AN hour after the death of Charles II., the new King went to visit the Duchess of Portsmouth and gave her, Barrillon tells us, "many assurances of his protection and friendship." Policy, rather than any personal regard for his late brother's mistress, was the motive for this step. James, as was very soon to appear, cherished projects which were not likely to commend themselves to his people, and for the execution of which money was essential; and, except in a Parliamentary way, there was no means of obtaining the money he required, unless he obtained it, as Charles had done, from the King of France. His immediate object, therefore, was to persuade Louis XIV. to continue in his favour the subsidy which he had paid his brother. Hence, it was obviously to his interest to treat the duchess, who enjoyed the favour and confidence of Louis, with every consideration.

That monarch, on his side, sent the bereaved lady, through Barrillon, an assurance of the continuance of his protection, which the Ambassador informs his master, "had given her the only consolation she had had since the death of the late King;" and when,

at the beginning of March, James II. had the bad taste to deprive the little Duke of Richmond of the post of Master of the Horse, which the boy's father had given him, he instructed Barrillon to let his Majesty understand that he was greatly surprised at such an act.

James, alarmed at his paymaster's displeasure, visited the duchess and explained to her that the reason he had deprived the Duke of Richmond of the Mastership of the Horse was the inconvenience which would arise from leaving so important a post in the hands of a boy of thirteen, who would be unable properly to discharge the duties attached to it for some years to come. He paid her a sum of over £12,000, which was probably the final instalment of the £100,000, which the late King had promised her, and granted her a pension of £3,000 for herself and £2,000 for Richmond, which she asked should be combined into one of £5,000 for her son. But she claimed in vain the fulfilment of a supposed promise by Charles II. of a large Irish estate or interest worth from twenty-five to thirty thousand pounds. "This," wrote Barrillon, "joined to her disgust at seeing the Duke of Richmond dispossessed of the charge of Master of the Horse, has caused her to speak a little freely, and she often complains that her services are forgotten."

But if James were inclined to forget her services, the nation was not; and its conviction that she had been the principal cause of the close alliance between the late King and Louis XIV. had rendered her so generally odious as to make it appear highly probable that when the Parliament which had been summoned should meet, a direct attack would be made upon her. Appre-

hensive of this, and dissatisfied with the treatment she had received from James, she resolved to return to France, and in August she took her departure, accompanied by her son. The King, though probably a good deal relieved at her decision, took leave of her very cordially, promised that her apartments at Whitehall should be reserved for her,* and exhorted the Duke of Richmond to embrace the Catholic faith.

"Thus," observes the duchess's historian, M. Forneron, "England emerged from the French servitude. Not that James II. was more insensible to the *livres* tournois than his brother; but his fanatical and narrow mind, the baseness of his sentiments, brought his reign to a speedy termination. The great adversary of Louis XIV., William of Orange, ascended the English throne. The disasters foreseen by the diplomatists and retarded by Louise de K roualle accumulated upon France."

A year after the departure of the Duchess of Portsmouth for France, she returned to England and remained there until July, 1688. Whether this visit appeared suspicious to Louis XIV., or whether because, according to Saint-Simon, the duchess had permitted herself to indulge in some rather outspoken criticisms of Madame de Maintenon, Louvois received orders to send her a *lettre de cachet* exiling her. Courtin, however, who happened to see this document in Louvois's cabinet

* But as little as two years later, we hear that "the fine crystal glass in the windows of her luxurious apartments at the end of the Long Gallery had disappeared and the holes stopp't up with straw very scandalously" (Verney Memoirs). In April, 1691, her apartments and all the treasures she had accumulated in them were destroyed by a fire.

one day when he had called to see the Minister, interceded for her, declaring that it would be dishonourable to forget the services she had rendered France; and Louis XIV. burned the *lettre de cachet* with his own hands.

When James II. lost his throne, the duchess lost her pension, for, though she reminded William of Orange, through Henry Sidney, of the supposed services she had rendered him during the struggle over the Exclusion Bill, he declined to continue it.

Early in 1692, the Duke of Richmond, who had joined the Church of Rome and had served for a time in the French Army, took his departure for England, "without saying a word about his journey to any one,"* where he reverted to the Reformed Faith and was reconciled to the new régime.

The duke was an extremely handsome young man, with the easy and pleasant manners of his royal father, but, as his descendant, the present Earl of March, is fain to admit, "there can be no denying that, in his later years, lax principles and a love of dissipation formed very prominent features of his character."†

His mother, in a letter to Louis XIV., declared that she was "in despair" at the conduct of her son, and this was no doubt true enough, since the King had conferred upon Richmond a pension of 20,000 livres, which did something to console the duchess for the loss of her English revenues. However, Louis very generously continued to her the pension which her son had forfeited.

* Dangeau.

† "A Duke and his Friends" (Hutchinson, 1911).



CHARLES LENNOX, FIRST DUKE OF RICHMOND K.G.

From a painting by Sir Godfrey Kneller in the collection of the Duke of Richmond, K.G.

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From that time, the duchess appears to have devoted herself to the care of her estate of Aubigny, but, owing to a variety of causes, the chief of which seems to have been her love of gambling and the inability to shake off the extravagant habits she had contracted in England, she found herself ere long in serious pecuniary difficulties; and but for the intervention of Louis XIV., who, in September, 1699, issued a royal decree staying the proceedings which had been instituted against her for a period of twelve months, and renewed the same on the petition of the duchess year after year until the end of his reign, Aubigny would have been seized by her creditors.

Nor was it only against her creditors that the duchess found a support in the decrees of the Royal Council. In 1703 Louis supported her claims for compensation against the Estates of Brittany, when her father's manor near Brest was appropriated by the Government for the construction of the harbour and arsenal, and compelled them to pay her over 50,000 livres.

Under the Regency, her pension was increased to 24,000 livres; but experience had taught her to distrust pensions, and, accordingly, at her request, it was, in 1721, commuted for the sum of 600,000 livres, "in consideration of the great services which she has rendered France, and to give her means to support her rank and dignity."

In 1715 she had paid a visit to England, in the hope of getting a pension or an annuity out of George I.; but her journey was a fruitless one.

The Duchess of Portsmouth outlived all her contemporaries and died in Paris, where she had come for

medical advice, on November 14, 1734, at the age of eighty-five, having survived Charles II. by nearly half a century, and their son, the first Duke of Richmond, who died in 1723, by eleven years. In her latter days, which were passed in retirement at the Château of Aubigny, she is said to have become very devout, and, to make some atonement for her past sins, she founded a convent for hospital nuns on her estate and gave a good deal of money for the decoration of churches. She appears to have retained some traces of the beauty which had captivated Charles II. almost to the end of her life, for George Selwyn, who saw her when she was over eighty, says that she was still attractive. She was buried in the Church of the Barefooted Carmelites, in the chapel of her ancestors of the House of Rieux.

A few words must be said concerning the later years of the Duchesse de Mazarin.

Once having recovered the pension of which her intrigue with the Prince de Monaco had caused her to be deprived, the duchess subsided contentedly enough into the position of a favourite of the second rank; for she was neither proud nor mercenary, and the partial defection of Charles II. gave her more leisure to devote to other and perhaps more welcome admirers. In her apartments at St. James's, she led a very agreeable existence, and "found herself surrounded by all the noblest and most witty persons whom England possessed." One of the *habitués* of this little Court, Saint-Évremond, has left us the following picture of it :

"Freedom and discretion are equally to be found

there. Everyone is made more at home than in his own house and treated with more respect than at Court. It is true that there are frequent disputes there, but they are those of knowledge not of anger. There is play there, but it is inconsiderable and only practised for the sake of amusement. You discover in no countenance the fear of losing, nor concern for what is lost. Play is followed by the most excellent repasts in the world. There you will find whatever delicacy is brought from France and whatever is curious from the Indies. There is neither a plenty that gives a notion of extravagance, nor a frugality that discovers penury or meanness."

Among the most frequent visitors were Nell Gwyn's former admirer, the Earl of Dorset; Dr. Vossius, Canon of Windsor; the Protestant refugee Justel, and the poet Waller.

It will thus be seen that the duchess had begun to form a decided taste for intellectual pleasures; but this did not prevent her from continuing to indulge in numerous gallantries, one of which had a tragic termination. In 1684, her nephew, the Chevalier de Soissons, youngest son of her sister Olympe, Comtesse de Soissons, visited England, and conceived for his aunt, who, though now approaching her fortieth year and already a grandmother, was still almost as beautiful as ever, a most violent passion. The latter, however, repulsed him with horror, her heart at that moment being fully occupied by a fascinating Swedish nobleman, the Baron de Banier, son of the general of that name who had distinguished himself under Gustavus Adolphus. Mad with jealousy, the chevalier challenged

the baron to a duel, and wounded him so severely that he died a few days later. "I have told my son," wrote Madame de Sévigné, "about this combat of the Chevalier de Soissons. We could not have believed that the eyes of a grandmother could work such havoc."

This affair caused a terrible scandal, and M. de Soissons had to stand his trial for manslaughter. Madame de Mazarin was in despair; she denied herself to nearly all her friends, draped her rooms in black, and spoke of withdrawing to a convent in Spain. But this desire for a conventual life did not last long, and was replaced by a violent passion for play, and in particular for the fascinating game of *bassette*, which absorbed her to the exclusion of all other interests.

When the Revolution came, the duchess, as a relative of James II.'s queen, naturally found herself regarded with suspicion by the triumphant party, which demanded her expulsion. However, her friends were sufficiently influential to interest the new King in her favour, and not only to obtain permission for her to remain in England, but also a new pension; for the one which she had received from Charles II., and which had been continued by his brother, had, of course, ceased with the fallen dynasty. However, William III., being neither a lover nor a relative, did not feel justified in allowing the lady more than half the sum which she had hitherto been receiving, and, although Madame de Mazarin succeeded in continuing to the end the appearance of a princely existence, it was only by the aid of confiding tradesmen.

During the last years of her life, she appears to have become too much addicted to the pleasures of the

table, particularly in the matter of wine and strong waters; and the rhyming epistles which Saint-Évremond addressed to her contain certain counsels of temperance which are for us distinctly unpleasing revelations :

“ Beauté des models chérie
Et de moi plus que ma vie !
Moins d’eaux fortes, de vins blancs
Vous irez jusqu’à cent ans.
Mais que le ciel vous envoie
Double rate et double foie,
L’eau de Madame Huet
Vous les séchera tout net.
Contre eau d’anis, eau d’absinthe,
Qu’on boit en tasse de pinte,
Vos poumons ne tiendront pas.
Et votre cœur doux et tendre,
Qu’ont fait les dieux pour se rendre
Au service des amants,
Périra par vos vins blancs.

These excesses no doubt hastened the duchess’s end, and it would, indeed, have needed a constitution of iron to have withstood for any length of time “ *absinthe en tasse de pinte*.” In the spring of 1699, she fell seriously ill, and on the following July 2 she died at a house which she had at Chelsea—then, of course, only a village—to which she had removed in the hope that the air and repose of the country might afford her some relief. She was only fifty-three.

The inconsolable Saint-Évremond, whose devotion blinded him to his idol’s faults, wrote to a friend : “ She had been the most beautiful woman in the world, and her beauty preserved its splendour up to the last moment of her life. She had been the greatest heiress in Europe, and magnificent, though poor, she

had lived more honourably than the most opulent could do. *Elle est mort sérieusement avec une indifférence chrétienne pour la vie.*"

In death Hortense fell into the hands of the husband whom she had so successfully evaded during life. For no sooner was she dead, than her creditors seized her corpse, which no one but M. de Mazarin was rich enough to redeem. That nobleman caused it to be brought back to France, and, if we are to believe Saint-Simon, marched it about with him from place to place. Finally, after a temporary interment at Notre-Dame-de-Liesse, it was laid to rest in Mazarin's tomb.

Madame de Mazarin had four children : a son, Paul Jules, Duc de Mazarin et de la Meilleraye (1667-1731), and three daughters, Marie Charlotte (1662-1729), married to the Marquis de Richelieu, who carried her off from a convent to which her father had consigned her ; Marie Anne (1663-1720), who took the veil and became Abbess of Lys, and Marie Olympe, born in 1665, who married the Marquis de Bellefonds.

Paul Jules had a son, Gui Paul Jules, Duc de Mazarin et de la Meilleraye, on whose death in 1738 the male branch of the family became extinct, and a daughter, Armande Félicité, who married Louis de Mailly, Marquis de Nesle, and became the mother of five daughters, four of whom, the Comtesse de Mailly, the Comtesse de Vintimille, the Duchesse de Lauraguais, and the Marquise de la Tournelle (better known under the title of Duchesse de Châteauroux), carried on the amorous traditions of their beautiful ancestress by becoming successively the mistresses of Louis XV.

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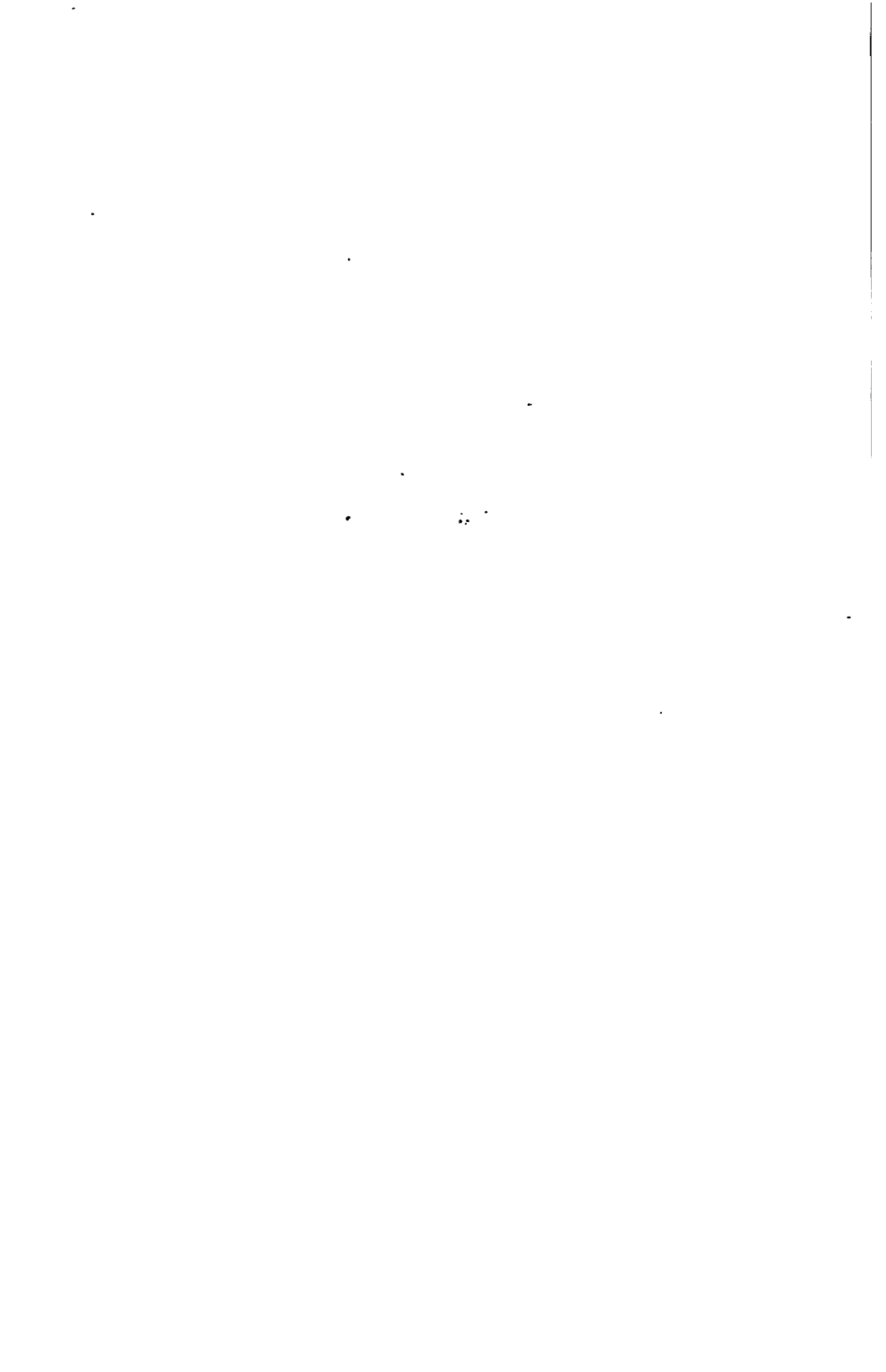
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